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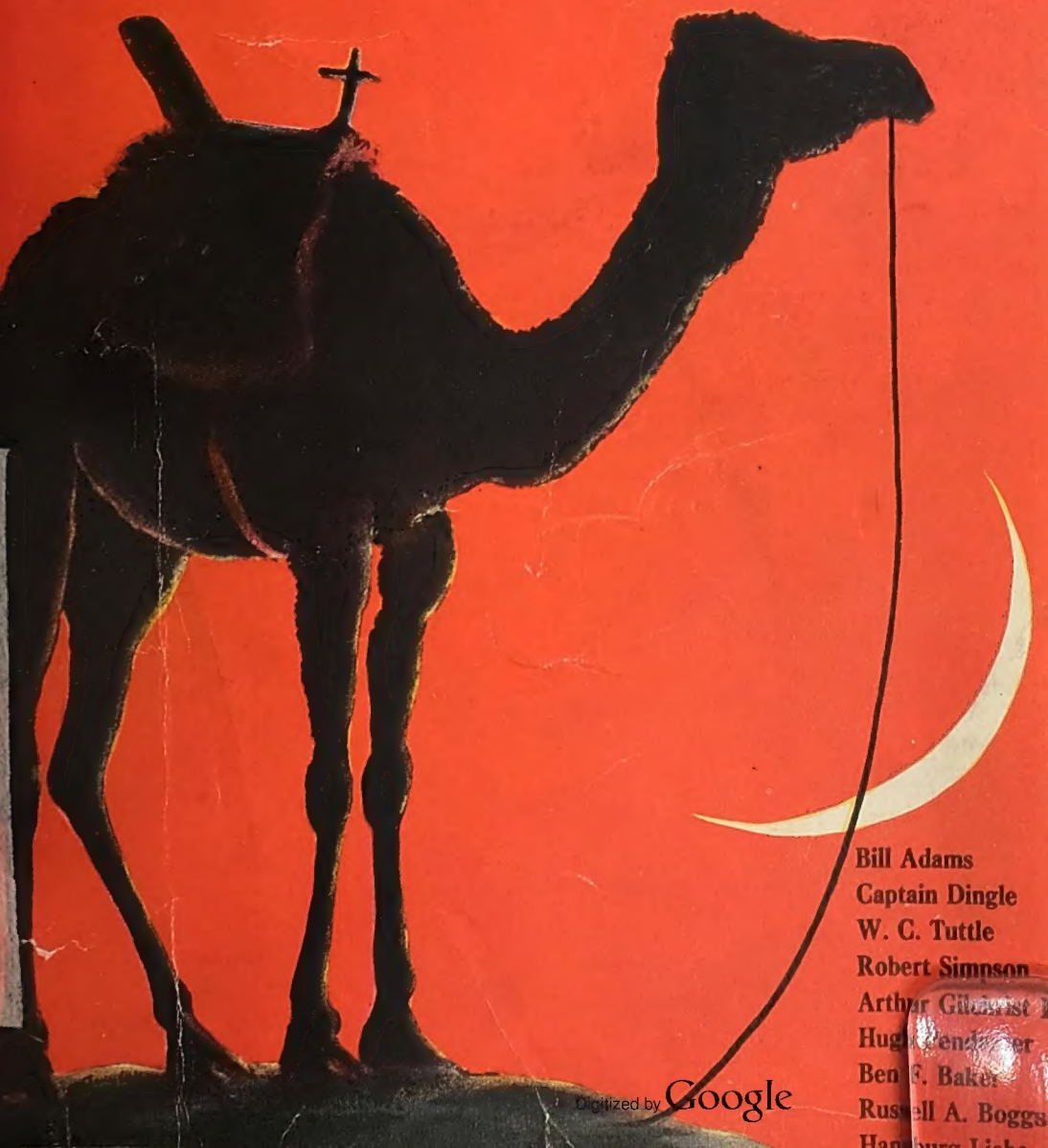

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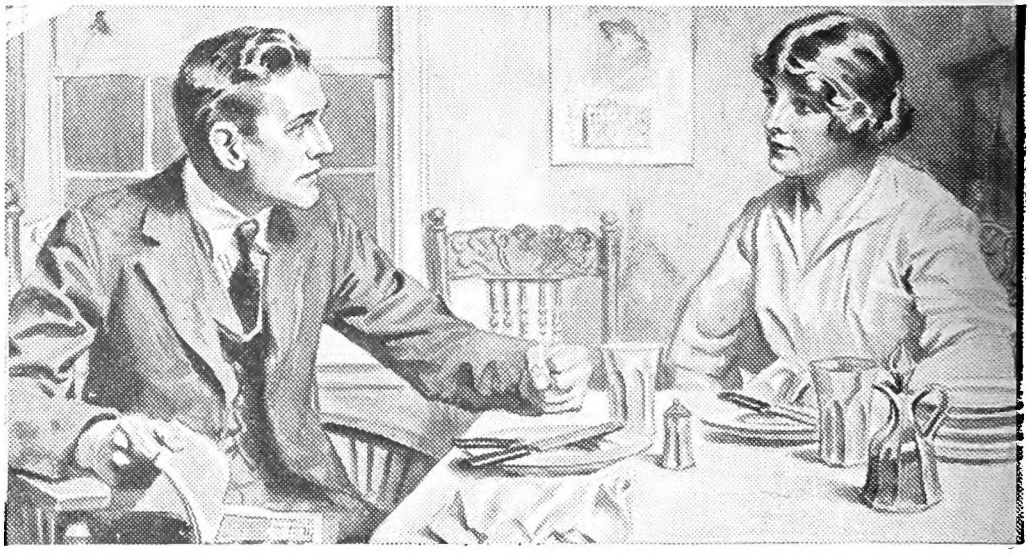

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BEYOND the Jordan men establish independent kingdoms and seek for gold in ancient tombs. "THE LOST TROOPER," a complete novel by Talbot Mundy, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Don't forget the dates of issue for *Adventure*
—the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month

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Tangled Trails

A Complete Novelette by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Powder Law," "The Spark of Skeeter Bill," etc.

"ROMEO" Kendall drove his stage team into Marlin City, skidded his horses and stage to a stop in front of the bank, and announced to the world that he had been held up and robbed. The bank officials investigated the treasure-box and told Romeo that he was wrong.

Then Sun Dog County laughed at Romeo Kendall, who stuck to his story, persistently and profanely. He swore by all the horned-toads and crippled-crawlers that two men had stuck him up, and that one of them held a gun on him while the other went through the treasure-box.

But the contents of the box, which consisted of ten thousand dollars in currency, consigned to the Marlin City bank, was intact; which made Romeo out a liar despite his protests.

Romeo drove the stage for Pelham & Malvene, of Silverton, who owned the line to Whipoorwill, via Marlin City, and also the line which ran through the Smoky Hills to Redrock. Sun Dog County decided that Pelham & Malvene were hard-up for help when they put Romeo on a driver's seat, but there he sat.

Romeo had been christened Egbert, which name did not fit him. "Eg" fitted him better, to which had been added "Bad," making him "Bad-Eg" Kendall. It was good and sufficient, but doomed to change, when "Soapy" Caswell, the wealthiest cattleman in the county, brought his daughter to Silverton.

Bad-Eg immediately fell in love with her. His affections were not reciprocated, but this did not affect Bad-Eg in the least. He found out what rooms the Caswells occupied in the Boston hotel, and when the shades of evening drew down over Silverton he procured a ladder, placed it against the window-sill of his lady love and proceeded to regale her with seductive strains from a guitar.

While the idea was not at all new, it attracted the attention of several folks who had seen him carrying the ladder. Everything proceeded nicely, except for the fact that Bad-Eg made a mistake in the room.

Soapy Caswell did not care for guitar music; he had but lately finished a disastrous session of draw-poker. He lifted the window just above the head of the love-blind Bad-Eg, and proceeded to crown the aforesaid Bad-Eg with a hand-painted water-pitcher. Bad-Eg lost consciousness

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and his nickname at the same time, and when he woke up he was named Romeo.

In no way did he resemble the Bard of Avon's famous lover, after whom he was named. He was thin of feature, shallow of eye and had what the barbers call "squirrel-teeth." His hair had been yellow in his youth, but now it was bleached to a neutral tint, and each and every hair seemed to follow the theory of "every one for himself."

Romeo did not feel ashamed of his blighted love affair, but his thin soul did vibrate with anger against Soapy, who, not content with knocking Romeo off the ladder, went to the office of Pelham & Malvene and told Romeo that if he did not keep away from his daughter he would clip Romeo's ears off and collect predatory animal bounty on same. Romeo's feelings were encased in thick hide, but this shaft went home. Romeo was not sure what a predatory animal was, but he wisely figured that it was either a skunk or a coyote.

IT WAS early morning three days after the Romeo holdup, and the Nine Bar Nine outfit were busily engaged in their favorite occupation of storing away food.

The Nine Bar Nine cattle ranch was located about twelve miles southeast of Marlin City, and consisted of the usual array of badly-in-need-of-repair corrals, a one story, unpainted ranch-house, with a wide, comfortable porch. The long bunkhouse had been built to accommodate a big crew of hired men; but the herds had never grown too big for three or four men to handle them.

Lafe Freeman owned the place. He was a small, wiry, grizzled man, with keen, gray eyes and a wit which was sharper than a spine on a barrel-cactus. Lafe was one of the old school of gunmen—a fast-disappearing type at this time.

Just now the Nine Bar Nine only had two hired men. "Silent" Slade, a giant of a puncher, with a humorous face, slow of movement, but not slow of temper. A continuous flow of conversation had earned for him the nickname.

Silent wore a fancy chin-strap on his sombrero; cut the sleeves of his fancy shirt off at the elbows and affected southwest type of high-heeled boots, with fancy, stitched tops. He was also a trifle gaudy in the hand-stamped cartridge belt and silver ornamented holster.

"Harp" Harris could ride anything he could cinch a saddle onto, rope anything he could get in reach of, and was physically a human slat. Harp was well over six feet, but so extremely thin that he looked taller. A pair of bat-ears grew almost at right angles with his long, solemn face, and he improvised most of his own music from an ancient jew's-harp.

Harp Harris split a fried egg exactly down the center, lifted one-half of it on a carefully balanced knife-blade, but stopped with it just short of his mouth, and spoke slowly.

"Wonder if he's still huntin' for the joker?"

Silent Slade lifted his head and stared at Harp. Lafe Freeman, the owner of the ranch, placed his knife and fork carefully on his plate and looked at Harp curiously.

"Of whom," said Silent slowly, "of whom are you speaking?"

Harp deposited the egg carefully within his wide mouth, patted his lips with the knife-blade and proceeded to slide the blade under the remaining half of the egg on his plate.

"Brick Davidson," he mumbled.

"What about him?" asked Lafe. Brick was the sheriff of Sun Dog County and former employee of the Nine Bar Nine.

"You tryin' to run Brick's office?" asked Silent.

Harp upset his egg, with an impatient gesture, and looked at Silent.

"For —— sake, can't a feller open his mouth without you jaspers takin' down your ropes? I was just thinkin' out loud, thasall."

"He was thinkin' out loud," said Silent wonderingly to Lafe. "How would yuh believe that a think could get past that mouthful of egg? Some day he'll do that with his mouth filled, and them thinks will just bust out all over him, like the hives."

"Yes, yore funny," admitted Harp seriously; "I almost laugh—when I look at yuh, Silent."

Harp lifted his coffee cup to his lips and took a swallow, but it went down the wrong channel, hung for a moment and then caused Harp much physical discomfort. Silent leaned across the table, grasped Harp by the collar and proceeded to hammer him viciously between the shoulders, which was

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beneficial to Harp and also satisfied Silent's desire for revenge on Harp.

"If that's a game—lemme in on it."

Silent turned and looked at Brick Davidson, who was standing in the doorway grinning widely. Brick was neither of heroic proportions nor god-like of features. His hair was the color of new bricks, and his thin face was speckled with freckles. Nature gave him a wide mouth and blue eyes, and the gods of humor had marked him for their own.

Harp tore away from Silent and glared at Brick through his tears. Then he wiped his face with the back of his hand and took a jew's-harp from his pocket.

"Don't!" begged Brick. "Can'tcha be friendly, Harp? I don't no more than get here, when yuh try to drive me away."

"Didja ever find out who held up Romeo Kendall?" grinned Silent, shoving a chair out to Brick, who sat down and took out his tobacco and papers.

"Not yet," admitted Brick slowly, and Harp began to play softly.

Silent reached for the egg platter, and Harp got to his feet, walked to the doorway, where he sat down with his back against one sill and his knees against the other. Harp's idea of solid comfort was to find a spot where he could fold himself up like a carpenter's rule.

"What are yuh doin' over here this time of mornin'?" asked Lafe Freeman.

Lafe absolutely adored Brick Davidson, but denied having a pleasant thought for any one on earth.

Brick exhaled a thin stream of smoke through his nostrils, as he pursed his lips.

"You sold some cows to Dal Melchior a few days ago?"

"Sure I did," nodded Lafe. "Four thousand dollars cash."

"Did yuh put the money in the bank, Lafe?"

Lafe shook his head. He was notoriously afraid of banks.

"Lemme look at some of that money?"

Lafe rubbed his chin. Was Brick joking him?

"What's the idea, Brick?"

"Lemme see the money, will yuh?"

Lafe produced a worn wallet and extracted a couple of bills, which he glanced at and handed to Brick.

"Them two twenties was in the bunch."

Brick examined them closely. Silent and Harp had both moved in close and were watching Brick. If it was a joke it must be a good one, because Brick was very serious. Brick looked up at Lafe.

"Lafe, yuh made a mistake when yuh didn't bank this money."

"All right, I'll bite," grinned Lafe. "What's the joke?"

"It's no joke, Lafe. Mebbe yuh can see somethin' funny in it, but the fact of the matter is—them bills are counterfeit."

Lafe snatched the bills from Brick and glared down at them.

"I don't believe a —— word of it!" he exploded. "I—uh—say, Brick; ain'tcha mistaken?"

"How in —— do you know bad money from good?" asked Harp.

"Do yuh mean to say that all my money is bad?" demanded Lafe.

"Likely all yuh got for them cows is bad," nodded Brick. "Look close at these bills, Lafe. Do yuh notice that them ain't silk lines in the paper? Drawed with colored ink. Them bills was in that joke holdup."

"Don't stop talkin'," begged Lafe nervously. "Tell me who made 'em and I'll go and massacree him."

"That holdup bothered me," said Brick. "At first she looks a lot like they was joshin' Romeo Kendall, but it didn't make me laugh, 'cause they didn't razoo him none. I went up and talked with Bob Malloy at the bank. He gets out some of the money and we looks her over. Then Bob gets some kind of a statement from the Silverton bank, which shows that the size of the bills don't fit the order. The money they got was all twenties and tens, but the papers says that there's twenties, tens and fives.

"Then Bob sizes up the layout and finds out that the money ain't worth nothin'—unless yuh can keep it circulatin'. Most of it was danged well made, but we found some that was pretty raw. Them two holdup men opened that box, took out the real money and put in the bad. Foxy, eh? They figured it would be a good joke on Romeo and that nobody would ever find it out."

"Your danged brains is goin' to cost me four thousand dollars," sighed Lafe. "And high-water! I paid Harp and Silent out of that money last Saturday—yesterday."

"Thasall right," grinned Silent. "We lost it playin' faro. I feel better over it now than I did."

"The bank will make good what yuh got

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left, Lafe," said Brick. "They stand to lose ten thousand. Pelham & Malvene ain't responsible for holdups, bein' as they won't handle stuff for any express company."

Lafe nodded.

"Yeah, I reckon I won't lose nothin', but she looks like a hard deal to beat. If it was horse stealin' or cow rustlin' yuh might stand a chance, but bad money don't leave no tracks."

"Anythin' crooked leaves tracks," said Brick seriously.

Lafe squinted at Brick's face and smiled.

"Brickie, yore goin' to get married pretty soon, ain't yuh?"

Brick scratched his nose and shifted his feet.

"Well, I still have hopes, Lafe—as the horse-thief said when the rope broke."

"You land them fellers who think they're the mint, and I'll give yuh half of that four thousand for a weddin' present."

Brick grinned—

"That's danged generous of yuh, Lafe."

"No, it ain't, Brick," Lafe shook his head. "I don't figure you'll land 'em."

Lafe threw back his head and laughed heartily at his own humor.

"I'll help yuh, Brick," stated Harp seriously.

"——! This ain't a perade!" snapped Silent. "Detectives don't work to music."

"If Lafe had only put his money in the bank——"

Harp was entirely apologetic.

"Uh-huh!" exploded Lafe. "O-o-oh, yeah! Like you do."

"Feller gets fore-footed the minute he suggests anythin'," wailed Harp. "If I got paid a livin' wage I'd put somethin' in the bank, but a feller——"

"This," replied Lafe solemnly, "this is a —— of a time to ask for a raise, Harp."

"There ain't no harm in keepin' your wants before the public, is there?" seriously, "I don't blame folks for makin' their own money. If I had a pen and ink——"

"And brains enough," added Silent. "You've got about as much chance of makin' money with a pen and ink as yuh have of puttin' on a jew's-harp concert in New York."

"Who in Sun Dog has got brains enough?" asked Harp.

"Now yo're talkin'," grinned Brick. "It took brains to make that money and it took brains to figure out that way of makin' a trade. Romeo ain't got no idea what they looked like, but he swears they had cannons with the wheels taken off and pistol-butts put on."

"Why in —— do they hire them kind of drivers?" asked Silent, who detested Romeo.

Silent was a giant of a man, with hands like hams, and feet which no ready-made boot would fit.

"Why don't they hire men like Grant Dale?" queried Silent when nobody seemed to answer his question. "Nobody'd stick Dale up without a fight, y'betcha."

"Dale would h'ist his hand as quick as Romeo did," argued Harp. "You and me and everybody would."

"Don't argue!" wailed Lafe. "I've had some bad news and I want to know what Brick is goin' to do."

"Find out who made that money," grinned Harp. "Anybody'd know what to do now. If I had a clue——"

Silent hunched his shoulders and circled Harp, opening and shutting his hands, as though preparing to annihilate Harp.

"You lemme a-lone!" wailed Harp. "I'm sincere, you danged hippy-pot-a-must!"

"Let him alone, Silent," ordered Brick grinning, and then to Harp—

"All right; yo're deputized to work with me."

"Hol' on!" grunted Lafe. "Who told you to come here and maverick my hired man?"

"Pa says you can go with the nice man." Brick patted Harp on the arm. "Take off yore hat when yuh go in anybody's house and don't forget yore handkerchief."

Harp grinned happily, but Silent shoved him aside and glared at Brick.

"Whatcha doin'—kiddin'? If yuh need a good man—I'm here."

"Much obliged, Silent. Yo're deputized to take care of the office while me and Harp run 'em to earth."

"Not me! Oh, not me, Brick! I've set in that danged office for weeks and nothin' come to pass. I need action."

"Then sweep it out once in a while," smiled Brick. "Maybe the county won't allow yore wages, but if they don't yuh can sue 'em."

"Where do I get off?" howled Lafe. "Yuh bring me four thousand dollars worth of bad news and then yuh swipes all my hired help. Ain'tcha got no feelin's?"

"I won't take 'em if yuh feels thataway, cow-man," soothed Brick. "I won't discommode yuh."

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"Don't short-hand yoreself," begged Lafe. "I can get along, I reckon. If yo're still short-handed I'll let yuh have one of Shep's yaller pups and a copy of *Pilgrim's Progress*."

"Aw, now yo're sore at me, Lafie," feelingly.

"You go plumb to ——!" Lafe bristled like a badger. "Take 'em away, cowboy."

"I'll try and return 'em in good order, Lafe."

"One cinch, they won't shrink," said Lafe looking at Harp and Silent. "Nossir, they won't shrink—unless yuh show 'em some work. If yuh need a real good man—yelp for me."

"Yuh never can tell," grinned Brick.

BRICK was forced to admit that he did not have the slightest clue to work on. He did not know how counterfeiters worked. In fact it was the first counterfeit money he had ever seen. He realized that it was a job far beyond the ability of any one he knew in Sun Dog county.

Just why they did not get the money into circulation in some other way was of no consequence to Brick. Ten thousand is a lot of money, and he knew that the Marlin City bank would be hard hit.

Marlin City was the county-seat of Sun Dog county, but such an honor rested lightly on its shoulders. It had one street, which was dusty and hot in the Summer and, according to an old inhabitant, "the coldest —— place in North Ameriky in the Winter."

The buildings were mostly built with false fronts, as if trying to fool the world into thinking that a one-story house could look like two, just because it had a tall front. The Marlin City bank was no exception to this rule. The sheriff's office fronted on this street, with the jail built at the rear. Of shade trees there were none, and Nature seemed to reserve its cooling winds for the Winter—when no one could appreciate them.

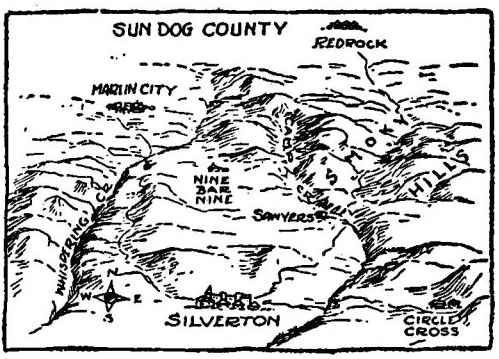
Not having any clues at all, Brick left Silent at the sheriff's office, tied an extra shirt inside his slicker-roll, and told Harp to "foller him and he'd wear diamonds."

Silent mourned audibly, but took heart when Brick promised to let him in on anything that looked like real trouble. Silent was a fighter and did not hide his light under a bushel. Harp was also a fighter, but one who did not lead up to it with war-talk. Brick loved them both like a brother, but preferred Harp for this job on account of his ability to keep quiet.

It was mid-afternoon when Brick and Harp rode down the main street of Silverton and went into the livery-stable.

The town of Silverton was much the same type of a cow-town as Marlin, except that Silverton covered more territory, with many vacant lots. Some of Silverton's business houses had been painted years before, but the weather had bitten deeply in spots, which gave them a splotchy appearance.

Silverton's one big point of interest was the Short Horn saloon and gambling house.



It was the largest thing of its kind in the country. A number of other places vied with it for the patronage of amusement lovers; but the Short Horn remained supreme.

The main street was wide and dusty, with warped board sidewalks and numerous long hitch-racks, which were generally filled with saddle and work horses. The livery stable was about the most pretentious building in the town, especially for height; as it required a second story, or loft, for hay. Near the door was a huge water-trough built from heavy planks, and placed in such a way that a horse could drink from it comfortably.

Jimmy McKeever, the stable-man, greeted Brick effusively.

"By jing! Howdy. Long time I no see yuh, Davidson. That ain't Harp Harris with yuh, is it? Well, I'll be danged if it ain't! Never seen him so fat. What did yuh do, Harp, eat a bean sideways?"

"Yo're a very fresh chambermaid," declared Harp slowly. "You need teachin'

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better manners," and, with a quick movement of his foot, kicked McKeever's feet from under him, dropping him on a pile of grain sacks.

McKeever rubbed his chin and grinned up at Harp.

"That," declared McKeever, "that was plumb sudden." And then to Brick—

"Did Buck Pelham come back with yuh?"

"Ain't seen him for a month, Jimmy."

"Yuh never?" McKeever got to his feet. "That's funny. He went to find yuh two hours ago."

"What for?"

"F'r gosh sake, didn't yuh hear about Grant Dale?"

"What about him?"

"Got killed near Smoky Hill grade this mornin', thasall."

"You kiddin' me, Jimmy?" Brick was very serious.

"Honest to —— I ain't, Brick. Buck Pelham went to Marlin City to get yuh."

"We cut across the hills from Whisperin' Creek," said Harp. "We must 'a' missed him thataway."

"The stage was held up," explained McKeever. "Ed Sawyer comes along in his buckboard about that time, hears the shot and brings poor Dale back with him."

"Who took the stage on to Redrock?" asked Harp.

"Who—oh, Dale wasn't drivin'—Buzzard Bailey was drivin'. Dale quit his job last night, and Malvene had to put somebody on the seat; so he hired Buzzard to drive until he can get a reg'lar man."

"Much obliged," nodded Brick. "I'll see what I can find out. C'mon, Harp."

"I know as much as anybody——"

McKeever wanted to talk, but Brick and Harp were already outside, headed for the office of Pelham & Malvene.

They found Jeff Malvene humped over his desk going over a bunch of invoices, but he got up as they came in. Malvene was a sallow complexioned person, with puffy eyes, a scraggly blond mustache and a mouthful of discolored teeth. His shoulders were rounded until it gave him the appearance of making a continuous search for something.

Pelham & Malvene's office was located on the West side of the street, and covered a space of about twenty by forty feet. About in the middle of the room, with one end against the wall, and facing the door, was Malvene's desk. A couple of extra chairs, a rough cupboard of pigeon-holes full of dusty papers, a stage-schedule and a fly-specked lithograph of Custer's Last Stand completed the furnishings. The ceiling was low, with a trap-door ventilator almost in the center.

"Buck made good time, I see," Malvene remarked. He was not very cordial in his manner.

"He missed us," replied Brick. "Tell me all yuh know about the killin' of Grant Dale."

"I don't know much. Ed Sawyer brought him in and said it happened near Smoky Hill grade. Seems that two men held up the stage and Dale went for his gun."

"Money on the stage?"

"I don't know," confessed Malvene. "Sometimes there is money shipped, but it ain't advertised. We're not responsible for valuables."

"You fired Dale, didn't yuh, Malvene?"

"Nope—quit. Said he was tired of driving over the same road all the time."

Brick thought this over, and then—

"Was Dale sore at yuh, when he quit?"

Malvene shook his head.

"Don't look like he was, does it? Man don't usually lose his life defending the property of a man he dislikes."

"No," admitted Brick. "No, he wouldn't do that. I'm wonderin' if it was the same two fellers who held up Romeo."

"That was a joke," laughed Malvene. "You can't make anything else out of it."

"Can'tcha?"

Brick was very thoughtful. Malvene squinted at him, but Brick turned and looked out of the door where two men, Buck Pelham and Silent Slade, were dismounting. They jingled their spurs across the threshold and Pelham went straight to Brick and held out his hand.

"Missed yuh, sheriff. Suppose you've heard about things."

Brick nodded.

"What there is to know—so far, Buck."

Buck Pelham was a big, bluff sort of a person, blunt of speech but well liked.

Brick looked at Silent, who was busily engaged in reading an old stage-schedule on the wall, but now he looked at Brick guiltily and took a ring of keys from his pocket.

"Locked up the ——hermitage, and here's yore keys."

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"Who told yuh to leave the office?" demanded Brick.

"Don'tcha try to boss me, Brick Davidson!" Silent was very emphatic, "I won't stand for it, I tell yuh. Lemme stay in the open and I'm val'able, but I ain't worth a dang inside four walls. Marlin City is as calm as a horse-trough, and I'll be —— if I stay there and let you mockin'-birds have all the fun. Don'tcha ride me, Brick!"

"Glad yuh came, Silent," said Brick seriously and turned back to Pelham, leaving Silent open-mouthed with surprize. He had expected to go back to the office.

"Got any idea who might do the job, Buck?" asked Brick.

"Not any. Maybe Buzzard Bailey can tell us more when he gets back tomorrow, but he was likely too scared to remember what they looked like."

"Kinda like Romeo Kendall," suggested Harp.

Pelham laughed—

"I reckon so, Harp."

"Why don'tcha hire men to drive yore stages?" asked Silent. "Buzz Bailey is a disgrace to his namesake and Romeo Kendall is a shrinkin' loco-weed."

"Dale was a good man," observed Pelham.

"If they killed him because he was a good man, the rest of your drivers will die a natural death."

"Tryin' to make us mad, Slade?" asked Malvene.

"Naw—ashamed."

Silent turned on his heel and walked outside. Brick grinned at Malvene's flushed face and turned to Pelham.

"I reckon we'll have to wait 'till tomorrow and see what Bailey has to say."

Brick and Harp joined Silent and they went to the Short Horn saloon and gambling house, the largest amusement place in the county. Otto Falk, the portly proprietor met them at the door.

"I am glad to meetcha," rumbled Otto, shaking hands with all of them.

"First we drink, eh?"

The place was only partly filled, but there was quite a crowd at one of the roulette tables. Brick filled his glass and turned to Otto.

"To Grant Dale, wherever he is, Otto."

"To Dale," said Otto softly.

Brick had only met Grant Dale; but Dale had seemed a clean-cut, energetic sort of a fellow, with a friendly smile for every one. His talk did not savor of the range; but he seemed to fit in. He was considered a good driver, and had demonstrated that he was a clever pistol-shot. He was one of those fortunate individuals for whom every one seems to have a kind word.

A DANCE-HALL girl walked behind them and Brick turned to look at her. She was rather pretty and her dress was just a trifle different from the usual tawdry things worn in honkatonks. Otto smiled at her in a fatherly way and nodded toward the cowboys.

"Miss Rosie, I like you to meet Mr. Davidson, Mr. Harris and Mr. Slade. Mr. Davidson is the sheriff."

The girl smiled in acknowledgment and passed on.

"Rosie she's a new girl," said Otto, looking after her. "She sings."

"She ain't the regular type, Otto," observed Brick.

"No. Rosie she just sings. I pay her good, Davidson. Nobody get fresh with Rosie. I think she be in hard luck and take work with me. You must hear her sing."

"Got a good face," observed Harp. "Yuh can always tell a good face. Anyway, I can, y'betcha."

"Yuh must 'a' picked yours in the dark," laughed Silent.

They talked of things in general, bought more drinks and went back to the street, where they sat down in the shade and rolled cigarets.

"Well," said Silent impatiently, "when do we arrest somebody, Brick?"

"Who would yuh select?"

"Somebody who'll start a fight. I'm honin' for action."

Harp humped over and produced his jew's-harp. Silent glared at him disgustedly.

"——!" he exploded. "If I ever get my hands on that asthmatic organ——"

"I like it," Brick was serious.

"Yuh do? Well, you can have it, cowboy. If yuh ain't goin' to do anythin', I'll see if I can find a poker game with a loose chair."

"Go ahead," said Brick. "I'll call yuh if I need yuh."

They watched Silent hot-foot down the street in search of amusement. A door closed behind them and they turned to see Tony Lynch, one of Otto Falk's gamblers.

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Tony was a pleasant-faced young man, and noted for his honesty at the gambling table. Tony had evidently just dressed, as he was buttoning a very flashy vest as he came up to them.

"Hello, sheriff. Howdy, Harp. How's things in Marlin these days?"

"Shufflin' along," smiled Brick. "Hear about Grant Dale?"

Tony hadn't, for the good and sufficient reason that he had been asleep since seven o'clock that morning. Brick told him the story as it had been told to him.

Tony frowned over the information—

"That's —— funny."

"What is, Tony?"

"About Dale. The games closed early last night. Soapy Caswell wanted to play stud, but wanted me to do the dealing. Buzzard Bailey sat in and we had a three-handed session. Long about five o'clock this morning Bailey dropped out. I think it was about half-past five when Soapy decided to quit and went to his room. A little later on I heard the stage leaving. I looked out and saw Buzzard Bailey driving the stage out of town—alone."

"Mebbe Dale was inside the stage," suggested Brick.

"Might 'a' been," agreed Tony. "Been used to seeing him on the driver's seat and never thought about him being inside the stage."

"Did yuh know Dale very well?" asked Brick.

Tony shook his head.

"No, not very. He's been here about three months. Nice kind of a boy. Never seen him drinking anything until last night."

"Drunk?" queried Brick.

"Yeah, he was."

Brick humped over, tracing meaningless patterns in the dust with a match. Tony watched him for a few moments and sat down beside him.

"Sheriff, do yuh know anything about phony money?"

Brick jerked up his head and stared at Tony.

"Meanin' what, Tony?"

The gambler took out a long bill-fold and extracted several bills.

"Somebody," said he slowly, "somebody is passing bad money around here. I've collected these in the last four months."

Brick examined the bills. They were clever imitations.

"Anybody else know about this?" asked Brick.

"Buck Pelham. He got some, too. I showed him the first two I got, but I don't know who passed 'em to me. That was about four months ago. Since then I've got the rest, but I've never been able to find who spent 'em."

"Why didn't you or Buck notify me, Tony?"

"I wanted to, sheriff; but Buck said it was a job for the U. S. Marshal."

"Buck's right," agreed Brick, "but I wish I had known."

"Likely a lot of it circulating around. Maybe they thought that a gambler was a good person to pass it on."

Harp grinned down at the ground. He knew of eighty dollars of bad money that had bought chips for him and Silent, but through no fault of theirs.

"Well, I've got to go to work," stated Tony, brushing off his trousers and replacing the bill-fold. "If I can help yuh any, sheriff—just yelp."

"Yuh never can tell," smiled Brick. "Much obliged."

A small middle-aged man, well dressed, was walking up the other side of the street, going toward the bank. Brick got to his feet and called to him—

"Can I see yuh a minute, Mr. Bray?"

The man stopped and squinted at Brick, as he and Harp crossed the street. Felix Bray was president of the Silverton bank. He was precise in his conversation, held himself aloof from the rest of the community and was not entirely popular in Silverton.

Felix Bray dressed well and his linen was immaculate. He never appeared unshaven. Brick had noted that Felix Bray never seemed to be looking at him while in conversation, but just past him. Bray's nose was sharp at the end and very thin at the bridge. He had a habit of compressing his lips tightly at the end of a sentence and often closed his eyes, as if amazed at his own wisdom. There was no question but what Felix Bray was a prominent citizen of Silverton, whether Silverton cared or not.

Brick lost no time in idle talk, but went straight to the point—

"Was there any money from your bank on that stage this morning?"

Felix Bray cleared his throat slowly, seemingly reluctant to divulge any information.

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"Yuh know it was held up, don't yuh?" asked Brick.

"I—I heard that it was, sir; but I have no information as to what was stolen. I believe there was a certain amount of money aboard, but am not prepared to say what amount. If it is necessary for you to know the exact amount, perhaps Mr. Nestor can give you the figures, sir."

"He's yore cashier?"

"Yes, sir. Is there anything else?"

"Nothin' but curiosity," grinned Brick. "Thanks."

"You are entirely welcome, sir."

Felix Bray gave a bird-like nod of his head and went on up the street.

"Nestor, eh?" mused Brick aloud. "Know him, Harp?"

"Heard of him?" grinned Harp. "Heard that he went out to see Soapy Caswell's daughter. Soapy got real tough and told Nestor to rattle his hocks off the Circle Cross. Said he'd be —— if his daughter would ever marry a counter-jumper."

Brick grinned—

"Soapy is goin' to raise Susie to be a old maid, don'tcha know it? Cashier of a bank ain't so bad."

"Soapy's got so danged much money that he likely wants Susie to marry some prominent galoot," said Harp.

A tall, cadaverous individual was going down the street, but hurried across when he saw Brick and Harp.

"Howdy, Doc," greeted Brick.

Doctor Bridger shook hands with them solemnly. Doc always appeared solemn. He was a fixture in Silverton, and had a sure-thing business. He was the only M. D., owned the only drug store in the town, and was coroner and undertaker. No matter whether the patient survived or not—Doc profited thereby. It was a business in which levity had no part.

"Suppose you're down here on the Dale case. Hold an inquest as soon as the stage gets in tomorrow," said Doc.

"Have yuh examined the body?"

"Yes. Dale was shot with a .45 caliber gun. The bullet severed an artery near the heart. Death was instantaneous."

"Bullet go plumb through him, Doc?"

"No, not quite. It ranged downward. Malvene says that Dale was a very good shot, but he did not have a chance, I suppose."

"I don't reckon he did, Doc. I'll be plumb glad to hear what Buzzard Bailey has to say."

BUZZARD BAILEY was not unlike the bird after which he was named. He was slight of frame, stoop-shouldered and with a parchment-like scrawny neck, which appeared wattled at times. His face was bony and his nose prominent.

His testimony showed that Dale had been a passenger on the stage and had resisted the attempt of two masked men to rob the stage, during which time he was shot and killed. Sawyer had appeared on the scene, coming toward Silverton, and had offered to take Dale's body to town. Buzzard's testimony was short and to the point.

"Where was Dale going?" asked Doctor Bridger.

"Redrock," replied Bailey.

"Paid his fare?" asked Brick.

"N—not to me," said Bailey. "He said that Malvene——"

"I wouldn't take his money," said Malvene generously.

"Was Dale on the seat with you?" asked Brick.

"Yeah—sure he was."

"When yuh left Silverton?"

"He was drunk when the stage left," volunteered Malvene. "Too drunk to ride outside; so we put him inside the stage."

"He sobered up and made me stop and let him onto the seat," said Bailey. "We just got to the curve on that little grade this side of the Camp Creek crossin' when these fellers popped out of the brush. Dale went for his gun, but they beat him to it. They made me dump off the money box. One of 'em held a gun on me and told me to mind my own business. I dunno what the other one was doin', but all to once they both vamoosed into the brush and then Ed Sawyer came along."

"Yuh don't know how much they stole, do yuh?" queried Brick.

Bailey shook his head.

"Nothin', I reckon. The box was there on the road behind the stage. I put her back on and turned it over to the bank at Redrock. If there was anything stolen the bank never said nothin'."

"How much money did you have in the box?" asked the doctor.

"——, I dunno, Doc. She's locked when I got it."

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"The man who fired the shot—was he down on the lower side of the grade, Bailey?"

"Uh-huh—in the brush."

"Any more questions you care to ask, sheriff?" inquired the doctor.

Brick smiled and shook his head.

"No, I reckon I've found out all I expected to; which may be sufficient."

"Got an idea, sheriff?" asked Buck Pelham.

"Y'betcha, Buck. C'm on, boys—" this to Silent and Harp.

"What I don't know is this," said Harp, "I——"

"Don't start recitin'," begged Silent. "What you don't know would take a danged long time to tell."

They sauntered down to the livery-stable and sat down on the horse-trough, which was in the shade. The trough was about half full of water, with six inches or so of muddy sediment at the bottom. Brick was slowly rolling a cigaret and staring down at the surface of the water, where a few flaky crumbs of tobacco had fallen. Suddenly he leaned closer and peered downward.

Pulling back the sleeve of his shirt he reached to the bottom of the trough and brought out a muddy Colt pistol. The light had flashed on the metal across the bottom of the butt, all of the gun except that part being buried in the sediment.

"For —— sake!" grunted Silent staring at the dripping weapon. "Whatcha know about that?"

Brick dried the gun on a handkerchief. It was a .44 caliber, with yellow bone handle, but without any distinguishing marks to identify it.

"Now, who in —— throwed their gun in the trough?" wondered Harp. "Must 'a' been drunk or crazy."

"Here comes somebody," whispered Silent. Brick shoved the gun inside his chaps and turned to see "Nebraska" Yocum and "Curley" Klein coming near them. Nebraska was a mouthy sort of a cowboy, but Klein was a sullen sort, who wore his holster tied down.

Nebraska was thin-faced, with close-set colorless eyes and a shock of blond hair scraggled over his forehead below the line of his sombrero. He had one front tooth missing from his thick-lipped mouth. Klein was small and dark, with a Hebrew cast of features and close curling, black hair. The whites of his eyes were shaded darkly, like the eyes of an Indian. Both men were wearing gay colored shirts and gayer colored mufflers. Nebraska affected bat-winged chaps; but Klein wore tight-fitting pants, tucked in the tops of his boots.

"Hiyah, sheriff," greeted Nebraska loudly. "Waitin' for some horse-thief to ride up to water his horse?"

"Mebbe," grinned Brick.

Klein walked on into the stable, but came back out in a moment and circled the trough as though looking for something.

"Find it?" asked Nebraska.

Klein shook his head—

"Naw, it wasn't there."

Brick did not question him, but Nebraska volunteered the information that Klein had lost his gun.

"I reckon I was pretty drunk," admitted Klein, slapping his empty holster.

"What kind of a gun was it?" asked Harp.

"Six-gun," growled Klein sullenly.

"Which covers several varieties," said Harp slowly. "Was this anythin' out of the general run?"

"Good gun," muttered Klein.

"What size?" asked Silent.

Klein squinted at Silent for a moment.

"Man sized, if yuh want to know, Slade."

"Yo're just as well off without it," drawled Silent. "Yuh ought to pack a .22."

Klein muttered a curse and his hand slid to his empty holster. Silent glanced at his hand and then at Nebraska.

"Loan him yore gun, Nebraska. He's soreheaded like a old she bear, and if he wants action——"

Klein glared at Silent for a moment, but turned and went into the door of the livery-stable. Nebraska shrugged his shoulders, grinned at Brick and went in behind Klein.

"Watch out, Silent," cautioned Harp. "That —— Klein had a gun in his holster when he went in there the first time."

"He won't shoot," said Brick. "Not with three of us here. Now who in —— lost this gun and why does Klein want it?"

"Don't yuh reckon it belongs to him?" asked Harp.

"If it did he'd describe it. He knows that somebody lost a gun and he wants to get it before somebody else does."

Nebraska rode out of the stable door and swung his horse up to the trough.

"You didn't find his gun, did yuh, Brick?" he asked.

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"No," replied Brick. "No, I never found his gun."

"He got paralyzed drunk last night and lost it," explained Nebraska. "Feller hates to lose his gun. Sore as a bear about it. Wanted him to come out to the ranch, but he says he's goin' to sleep in the stable for a while and then hunt some more for his gun."

"You still with the 88 outfit?" asked Brick.

"Naw, I'm with Soapy Caswell—the Circle Cross. Me and Curley and 'Snookie' Duggan. I'm foreman now, Brick."

"That's nice," agreed Brick. "Mebbe I'll come out and see yuh some day."

"Come ahead," grinned Nebraska. "We'd sure welcome yuh."

Nebraska swung off down the street.

Brick shook his head in wonder that Soapy Caswell should hire those three cowboys to guide the destinies of the Circle Cross. Duggan was the most unsavory of the lot, which did not mean that Klein and Nebraska were good citizens, by any matter of means.

Soapy was a solid citizen, but his interests seemed to be more centered around a poker-table than they did around the Circle Cross ranch. Soapy was as crabbed as a badger and his tongue was vitriolic to a startling degree, but nobody disliked him because of his disposition. Soapy did not like Brick, whose very presence seemed to irritate the old cattleman. Soapy was touchy about certain things—things which Brick never failed to mention.

Brick got up and cautiously handed the pistol to Silent, who was wearing a coat.

"Slip that into your pocket, Silent; but for gosh sake don't let anybody see it. I'm goin' to see if I can find Soapy Caswell."

"He's up at Otto's place, bogged down in a poker game," said Harp. "You better wait 'till he gets through."

But Brick waited for no man. Soapy looked up as Brick came in, and growled something inaudible as Brick moved in behind his chair. He shook his head at the dealer and moved back his chair.

"Got a —— jinks behind me," he growled. "Deal me out."

Brick smiled and walked back outside and in a moment Soapy joined him, grumbling about his run of ill-luck. They stopped at the edge of the board sidewalk. Across the street a couple of cowboys were settling an argument over which could jump the farthest, while several more stood on the sidewalk and made uncomplimentary remarks on the ability of both contestants. One of them made a jump, landed on his knees and sat down on his own spurs, much to the amusement of his competitor and the audience. Soapy watched them for a moment, with no trace of a smile on his face, and turned to Brick.

"Couldn't win 'f I had the pick of the deck. Whatcha want, you red-headed rawhider?"

"What makes yuh think I want anythin'?" grinned Brick.

"Go ahead—I'm listenin'," said Soapy seriously.

"You got three nice burglars workin' for yuh, Soapy."

"Have I? What do you care who works for me?" Soapy was very indignant.

"Keep cool," advised Brick. "You never bit anybody yet, Soapy."

Soapy glared at Brick, masticating rapidly.

"Yo're a —— old fool," stated Brick. "Drinkin' and gamblin' and hirin' crooks to run yore cows. Ain'tcha ashamed? Hirin' cowboys who get paralyzed drunk and lose their guns."

"Who did?" demanded Soapy. "Who got paralyzed and lost his gun?"

"Curley Klein did—last night."

"Like —— he did!"

"Sure did, Soapy. I found the gun in the horse-trough."

Brick grinned triumphantly, but Soapy demanded to see the gun.

"I've got her," stated Brick. "Forty-four Colt, with yaller bone handle."

"Smart, ain'tcha?" chuckled Soapy. "Oh, ve-e-ery smart; but Klein's gun ain't a .44 and it ain't got bone handles."

"Much obliged, Soapy," grinned Brick. "Go back to yore little game and lose a few more cows."

Brick sauntered off down the street, whistling unmusically between his teeth, while Soapy swore wonderingly and went back to his game.

Buck Pelham was alone in the stage-office when Brick came in, and Brick lost no time in opening conversation.

"Buck, how long ago did yuh first find out that bad money was rangin' around here?"

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Pelham rubbed his chin, wondering where Brick got his information.

"Did Tony tell yuh, Brick?"

"Yeah, but I knew before that, Buck. That Romeo holdup wasn't no joke, but everybody don't know it. There was ten thousand dollars in counterfeit in that treasure-box, when it got to the Marlin City Bank."

"Is that a fact, Brick?"

"Uh-huh. Tell me what you know."

"Not very much, Brick; except that most of the currency in the country is bad stuff. Used to be that silver and gold was about all yuh ever got hold of, but in the last few months it seems to have kinda dwindled down and currency took its place."

"But where does it start from, Buck? There's got to be some place where it starts, ain't there?"

Buck nodded slowly.

"Sure has, Brick. You find the men who killed Dale and you'll have the men who are flooding the country with bad money."

Brick silently agreed. He had met Dale, but knew little about him. He seemed entirely capable.

"Where did Dale come from, Buck?"

"Came here from Miles City, Brick. He was a good man."

"Do yuh reckon he was mixed up in this stuff in any way?" asked Brick. "Mebbe he knowed——"

"No, I don't think Dale was mixed up in it. He wasn't that type, Brick. I knew Dale pretty well, I think."

"Do you think he was killed because he went after his gun?"

Pelham frowned at the wall for a moment.

"I wish I knew just what happened, Brick."

Brick yawned and grinned.

"I'll tell yuh just as soon as I find out, Buck. *Adios.*"

Romeo Kendall was coming in as Brick went out, and Romeo was very anxious to talk about holdups with Brick.

"Had any luck, sheriff?" he asked.

"I quit playin' my luck a long time ago," replied Brick. "How would yuh like to have me show yuh the fellers who held you up, Romeo?"

Romeo rubbed the back of his hand across his lips and said—

"I—I reckon somebody was funnin' with me."

"We'll ask 'em pretty soon," grinned Brick.

Romeo gawped at Brick, who brushed past him and went across the street into Otto's place.

THE place was partly filled. A number of men were standing at a poker table, watching Soapy Caswell, who was betting recklessly. Over at the piano an emaciated-looking young man was explaining a piece of music to the girl, Rosie.

Brick sat down and began to roll a cigaret, but looked up and noticed that the girl was watching him. She nodded to the piano-player and came slowly up to Brick, who got to his feet.

"I was just looking over a new song," she said.

Brick nodded. For several moments neither of them said a word and then the girl said softly—

"Have you investigated the killing of Grant Dale?"

Brick stared at her curiously, and it suddenly struck him that perhaps the girl had been interested in Dale.

"Yes'm, I've kinda pried into it a little."

"Do you know a man they call Nebraska?"

Brick nodded slowly—

"Yes'm. Name's Yocum."

"He and Dale were together about midnight. I heard him tell Nebraska that he was going to bed because he had to take the stage out the next morning."

Brick studied the toes of his boots for a while.

"He likely meant that he was leavin' on the stage," said Brick. "He was headin' for Redrock. Kinda looks like he went for his gun and they nailed him, ma'am."

Brick turned his head and saw Buck Pelham coming in the door. He glanced around, saw Brick and came straight to him.

"Just got word from the Redrock bank, sheriff. Their money was intact. Nothin' missing."

"Another Romeo, eh?" smiled Brick, but Buck caught his meaning.

"Maybe. Barely possible that they heard Sawyer comin' and beat it."

"They did not," declared Brick. "Two road-agents are not goin' to lose a box of money, after killin' a man. They'd at least stay and see who it was, and it's a

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inch that they'd 'a' stood Sawyer in a corner while they helped themselves."

"I reckon you're right," agreed Buck. "I hope yuh find the guilty ones, Brick. I liked Dale. He was a nice feller and drove well and he never got drunk until last night."

"Got loaded for bear, eh?"

Buck nodded—

"Malvene said he was so drunk that they loaded him into the stage at the stable. Let me know if I can help yuh in any way, Brick."

"Yuh never can tell," replied Brick. "Much obliged."

Buck sauntered back to the door, and Brick turned to the girl.

"Was Dale drunk when you saw him last night?"

"No. I did not see him take a drink during the evening."

Brick scratched his head thoughtfully and nodded.

"Thank yuh, ma'am. I'm sure obliged to yuh, and that's a fact. *Adios.*"

Brick walked straight to a roulette layout, where Tony Lynch was spinning the wheel for a lone customer, Curley Klein. Klein looked up at Brick, watched Tony rake in the bet and walked away. Brick watched him stop at the poker-table and then turned to Tony.

"Did you see Grant Dale drunk last night, Tony?"

The gambler thoughtfully rubbed his forehead, but shook his head quickly.

"No, I didn't, Brick. I heard—danged if I don't believe it was——"

Tony glanced at the crowd around the poker-table, and called—

"Klein!"

Klein turned and looked at Tony, who motioned for him to come over. Klein was in an evil frame of mind, judging from his sullen countenance, and Brick noticed that his holster held a gun.

"Whatcha want?" he half growled.

"Wasn't it you who told me last night that Dale was blind drunk?"

Klein squinted hard at Tony and hesitated for a moment before he said:

"Well, what about it? Ain't a man got a right to get drunk?"

"What time was this?" asked Brick.

Klein turned his head and looked at Brick—looked him over from boots to hat and his lips curled sarcastically.

"None of your —— business!"

Klein's right hand had dropped to his gun as he spoke, but Brick did not seem to notice this. They were only about three feet apart—so close that the first shot would win. Brick laughed—laughed as though Klein had sprung the one big joke of the season. Klein's hand dropped away from his weapon and he shifted his glance to the gambler, as though seeking an answer to all this merriment.

The shifted eyes was all that Brick required. Like a flash he whipped his left fist flush against Klein's jaw, knocking him into the roulette wheel. Before Klein could recover from his astonishment Brick's right fist swung in a short arc to the angle of his jaw on the opposite side from the first blow, and Klein lost all interest in things.

It all happened in a few seconds, yet the room was in an uproar by the time Klein slid to the floor. Brick backed against the bar and Buck Pelham crossed over beside him. Brick did not know how many friends Klein had in the place, and he was not taking any foolish chances.

Klein sat up in a moment and looked around vacantly. He felt of his lower jaw and got slowly to his feet. Soapy Caswell scowled at Brick and at Klein.

"What was it about, sheriff?" asked Otto nervously.

"I asked him a question—a question he could have answered, and he told me it was none of my —— business," replied Brick evenly.

"Was it any of yore business?" queried Soapy.

"It sure was, Soapy."

Soapy turned back to the dazed Klein.

"Yo're fired, Klein! Understand what I'm sayin'? You've got six days' pay comin' to yuh. Go out to the ranch, roll yore little bundle and shake loose from the Circle Cross. Here's yore six-days' pay."

Soapy handed Klein some money and Klein put it in his pocket. His jaw seemed to bother him considerably, but he did not look at Brick as he went out of the door. Soapy turned back to the poker-table, talking loudly.

"I ain't got a —— bit o' use for the sheriff, but I ain't goin' to let my hired men talk back to him, y'betcha."

Brick grinned at Buck Pelham, but Buck was serious.

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"Look out for Klein, Brick. He's a killer if there ever was one, and he won't forget very quick. Whoo-o-ee! Boy, you sure do hit hard and fast. Mind tellin' me what yuh asked him?"

Brick explained the question and quoted Klein's reply.

"Klein got drunk last night and claims he lost his gun," added Brick. "I found a gun today. Klein refused to describe his gun; so he didn't get a look at the one I found."

Buck did not seem curious to know what kind of a gun Brick had found; so Brick continued:

"Who got Dale's gun, Buck?"

Buck shook his head.

"I dunno. I haven't seen it, Brick. He must 'a' had it with him when he was killed; but it's kinda funny he never turned it in when he quit. The gun he carried belonged to me—or rather to me and Malvene."

"Black-handled .45 Colt?"

Buck shook his head. "Nope. Forty-four Colt, with yellow bone handles, Brick."

"Oh," breathed Brick without a sign of surprise. "Well, I reckon I'm goin' to put on a little food. See yuh later, Buck."

"Watch out for Klein," cautioned Buck.

Brick grinned and went out of the door. It was growing dusk. Brick looked up and down the street, but there was no one in sight; so he crossed the street and went into a restaurant.

SILENT SLADE declared that he was having the time of his young life. He had found a vacant seat at a poker-table in McGill's saloon at the lower end of the street, and for the first time in years the god of good-luck smiled upon him.

McGill's place was a small saloon, with space enough in front of the bar for a couple of tables. McGill was a fleshy-jowled sort a person, with pig-like eyes and a round, fat nose. His lower lip had sagged from years of holding the unlighted butt of a cheap cigar, and he talked in a strangled, husky voice, casued no doubt from too much cheap whisky.

But the place and proprietor did not affect Silent in the least. His working capital had been the lean sum of one dollar and seventy-five cents, but several successive showdowns had given him enough to do business on a larger scale; with the result that he owned most of the money in the game.

Just now Silent was generous in his words; which seemed to annoy Romeo Kendall and "Snookie" Duggan, who were in the game. McGill was also in the game and McGill did not like Silent Slade. Duggan was a square-built cowpuncher, with a lantern jaw and a crooked nose. His forehead sloped back sharply from his eyebrows, which showed no break between them. Suspicion seemed to dog his tracks, but he was either clever enough or lucky enough to keep one jump ahead of the sheriff. Duggan's eyes were like the eyes of a chimpanzee—nearly round in shape and half hidden under his eyebrows.

"You fellers ain't got the courage to back up yore hands," complained Silent as he drew in a fair sized pot. "You play cards like li'l children. Duggan had me beat in sight, but his mind tells him that I've sure got somethin' from a ten to a ace in the hole, which mates up with one of them three face-cards in sight. Duggan thinks he's smart as ——, when he figures thataway, but li'l old man Slade's son only had a trey in the ho-o-ole, thasall."

Duggan shifted in his chair. Silent's jovial sarcasm was making him nervous.

"Li'l chips all comin' home to roost," chuckled Silent as he peered at the corner of his hole-card. "Don't nobody figure me for a trey in the hole this time."

"First king bets," intoned the dealer, and Silent shoved in a full stack of blue chips.

Duggan had the other king, and called the first bet. Romeo stayed with a seven in sight.

"Romeo thinks we're kiddin' like holdup men," chuckled Silent, and Kendall flushed at the gibe.

Another king fell in front of Silent and he roared with unholy mirth. Duggan shoved back his chair in disgust.

"You can't win, Duggan," laughed Silent. "Nobody who works with men who lose their guns can win at anythin'."

"Who lost a gun?" asked McGill.

"Curley Klein. Got drunk and lost his weepin'," Silent drawled humorously.

"How do yuh know he did?" asked Romeo.

"'Cause, m' little dearie," explained Silent slowly, "'cause it hath been found, that's why. Mebbe Klein thought he was a fish,

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'cause it was found in the horse-trough. Brick Davidson was a heap pleased over it, but didn't want to carry it himself."

"Who took it?" asked Duggan quickly.

"Ol' man Slade's handsome offspring. Yessir, the beautiful child got the gun. Klein gets cocky and refuses to tell us what she looks like.

" 'What size?' asks the sheriff.

" 'Man size,' says Klein, and then I told him he ought to pack a .22. Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Duggan looked past Silent and made a move as though to get out of his chair. Silent turned and saw Klein near the table, facing him, and Klein's face was black with rage.

For a moment they looked at each other, while the room went deadly still. Then Klein said:

"This time I'm goin' to laugh."

He barely finished the sentence when he drew his gun. Silent was in no position to draw, but he did not lose his nerve for a moment. Like a flash he ducked half under the table and reared straight ahead, upsetting the table, and as he threw himself forward his left arm encircled Snookie Duggan, throwing Duggan between himself and Klein.

Klein fired once, and the bullet tore through the edge of the table, burning Silent's forearm, but he was unable to fire again for fear of hitting Duggan. Romeo tried to get out of the way, but Silent and Duggan crashed into him and the three of them went down in a heap.

Klein was backing away from them, trying to get a shot at Silent, who had a strangle-hold on Duggan, holding him right against him as a shield, while he slowly worked his gun from his twisted belt. Klein realized what Silent was doing and took a chance. His bullet clipped through Silent's hair, but Silent suddenly let loose of the half-throttled Duggan and rolled free, shooting as he rolled.

Klein fired once more, but his aim was hasty and the bullet hit the wall a foot above Silent's head. Silent fired twice. Klein's right arm went as limp as a rope and his gun fell to the floor. For a moment he shifted his balance and then sat down hard on the floor.

"Set 'em up in the other alley!" grunted Silent, sliding to his feet.

Duggan's gun had fallen from its holster in the struggle and now he reached for it, but Silent's gun roared again and the bullet spun the gun off across the floor.

Romeo rubbed his bruised knees and stared at Silent. McGill had made no move to interfere. Silent looked at the wrecked card-table and at McGill.

"I'll take two hundred and fifty and call it square, McGill. I had that much in front of me."

McGill did not hesitate, but took a fat wallet from his pocket and began peeling off bills. Klein's right arm was out of commission and he was almost sitting on his gun; but he made no move to use his left hand.

Silent accepted the bills from McGill, backing against the wall as he counted them. Watching the men he stepped to the table and tossed several of the bills to McGill.

"Come again, Mac; those are counterfeit."

McGill glared at Silent and at the bills. "You're crazy!"

"If I take 'em," amended Silent. "Gimme good money."

McGill opened his wallet and took out a number of well-worn bills, which he passed to Silent. Then he took the ones Silent had rejected, looked closely at them and replaced them in his wallet.

"How do yuh know them bills are counterfeit?" asked McGill.

"Make a li'l guess," grinned Silent, backing toward the door. "So-long, Klein. I still say yuh ought to pack a .22."

Silent had stopped in the doorway, facing the center of the room. As he slowly turned to step outside, something crashed against his head and he fell sprawling on his face.

BRICK heard the shooting and went to the door, but was unable to locate the direction of the shots. Harp came across the street and joined him, but was not able to tell where the shooting was. Pistol-shots were common in Silverton, but these shots had been spaced as if it was something besides an exuberant cowpuncher celebrating.

"Sounded to me like she might be down by McGill's place," stated Harp. "There was one shot, and then in a little while another and then another. Then two shots pretty close together. Where's Silent, Brick?"

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"Wasn't he with you, Harp?"

"Naw. I've been in Scotty's place. Went lookin' for you, and I reckon I was in every place except McGill's; but I didn't see Silent."

Brick swung away from the door, leaving his hat in the restaurant, and Harp trotted at his heels. It was about two blocks to McGill's place. No one else had heard or paid any attention to the shots, which were a common thing in Silverton. It was the usual thing for a cowboy to announce his departure with a shot or two; but it was the spacing of these shots that aroused Brick's suspicion.

Brick halted near a window and looked inside. McGill was standing near the bar, reading a newspaper, while Romeo Kendall was alone at a card-table, playing solitaire. There were no other men in the place.

All was peace therein, but Brick was not satisfied. He walked around behind the saloon. About a hundred yards away was an old barn and corral; an indistinct mass in the night. Suddenly a match glowed dimly, as though cupped in a hand, and went out.

Brick and Harp walked slowly in that direction and reached the corral fence, but there was no sight nor sound of the party who lit the match. Came a low-pitched, half-grunt, half-groan, and the figure of a man seemed to detach itself from the heavy shadow.

"Who is that?" asked Brick softly.

For several moments the figure did not reply, and then—

"Who in —— do yuh reckon it is?"

"Silent!" grunted Brick.

"Yeah—Silent! What in —— hit me, Brick?"

"Did yuh get hit?" asked Harp quickly.

"Didn't yuh feel the jar?" wailed Silent. "By grab, it sure made cream out of the Milky Way. Did I get hit? Kinda."

"What did yuh get hit with?" asked Brick.

"Think I selected it?" wailed Silent.

"Yuh didn't get shot, did yuh?" This from Harp.

"Didn't I? Thanks, Harp. I'm sure as —— glad there's somethin' that didn't hit me."

Silent got painfully to his feet and rubbed his head. His hand went to his holster and he grunted aloud.

"They went fifty-fifty with me on guns, anyway."

"Did—did they take the gun I found?" spluttered Brick.

"No-o-o," drawled Silent. "They pulled m' shirt out all the way around to get the one I put inside though."

"That was the one I gave you, Silent."

"Naw, it wasn't. I figured that Klein might hanker for that gun, and I played safe and put that yaller-handled one in my holster. Danged good gun, Brick. I sure winged Klein with it. We had a nice li'l party while it lasted, but some snake-hunter popped me on the nut as I backed out the door."

"Out of McGill's place?" asked Brick.

"Uh-huh."

Silent searched his pockets and grunted mournfully:

"They took all m' money—the danged burglars. It was good money, too. I made McGill take back the counterfeits and pay me in good old U. S. A."

Gradually Brick drew the whole story from Silent, but he was unable to tell who hit him. It was a certainty that it was neither Klein, Duggan, Romeo nor McGill. Whether any of them had a hand in taking Silent away from the doorway would be hard to prove.

Brick was sorry that Silent had mentioned the bad money and also that he had told of finding the gun. Somehow Brick knew that there was a connection between that lost gun and some of the other things, but just what it was he did not know. He wondered if Soapy Caswell was mixed up in it in some way, and if he discharged Klein for the effect it would have in his favor.

It was easy enough to see why Klein made his gun-play at Silent. Klein was smarting from the fight at Otto's place, sore at Silent for what he had said in front of the livery-stable, and when he heard Silent repeating it—well, it would make any man fight. Duggan would probably assist Klein, if he had a chance. McGill had made little protest on taking back the bad money, but that meant nothing. If there was a lot of the counterfeit in circulation a saloon-keeper would get more than his share, especially in a town like Silverton, where every other building is a saloon.

Silent was leaning against the corral fence rubbing his head. Harp had sat down on a pile of poles, but Brick stood apart, thinking deeply.

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Moonlight silvered the old pole corral and softened the harsh outlines of the rough barn. From far up the street came the shrill notes of a violin, and the hoarse voice of a man, calling a quadrille:

"Balance all! Swing yore pardners!"

A man walked between them and the rear of McGill's place, carrying a lighted lantern, which cast a grotesque shadow of enormous legs; which seemed to take long steps but did not. He stopped at a shack, and the lifting-lever of his lantern creaked as he lifted the chimney and blew it out. From far out on the hills came the yip-yip of a lonesome coyote.

Suddenly Harp began playing soft and low—

"*Tung-g-g-g, bong-g-g, zung-g-g-g, hung-g-g*"

"My ——!" wailed Silent, shoving away from the fence. "How hard do I have to get hit to save me from that danged jews'-harp? I reckon I've got a awful hard head, but my ears are awful sensitive. Aw-w-w ——! He won't quit, Brick; so we might as well go away. I'm hungry—c'mon."

"Give me that gun, Silent," said Brick. "I'll feel better if I've got it. You talk too danged much."

"Leaves me crippled," wailed Silent. "I've got enemies; don'tcha know I have, Brick?"

"Home-made ones," grunted Brick, passing his own gun to Silent. "If yuh lose my gun I'll run yuh plumb into Canada."

"Whatcha want that yaller-handled smoke-pot for?" asked Harp.

"This," said Brick, fitting it into his holster, "this here yaller-handled gun is the one Dale packed."

"Heaven is my home!" grunted Silent. "Dale's gun? Did he get drunk and throw it away, Brick?"

"Dale wasn't drunk until after midnight, and nobody seen him take a drink after that."

They walked back past McGill's place. Silent turned and looked at the windows.

"They done me wrong in there," he declared, "and I'm goin' back and see what they've got to say. Ain't goin' to let nobody pat me over the head without me remindin' 'em of it."

Romeo was not there when they went inside. McGill, the lone inhabitant, looked up from his paper and visibly flinched at the sight of Silent's blood-streaked features and Brick's bare head. It looked like trouble to McGill and he didn't want trouble. He knew this trio well enough to know that they were not to be trifled with.

"Somebody tapped me over the head," stated Silent, looking around and back at McGill. "They took my money and my gun, McGill. I was still inside yore place when said tappin' was done. Bow to the gentlemen and recite yore piece."

"And nothin' but the truth," added Brick meaningly.

"Honest to ——, I dunno anythin'," declared McGill. "If you remember, Slade; I ducked behind the bar. I can't stand shootin', honest I can't. After you and Klein shoots at each other I gets all kinda trembly-like, and I was afraid you'd smoke somebody else up; so I ducked. Don'tcha remember me duckin', Slade?"

"Just like you remember who hit me," grunted Silent.

"I tell yuh I dunno," wailed McGill. "Duggan helped Klein out of the place, I know that. I think yuh hit him twice in the same arm. Anyway he's sick. Romeo never left until a few minutes ago, but none of 'em mentioned that you got hit. Mebbe yuh fell against the door—or somethin'."

"Yeah!" snorted Silent. "Mebbe I threw away my money and my gun. I've got a —— good notion to shoot yuh right loose from yore shirt, McGill. I'm bettin' that yuh know who hit me and you've likely got that money in yore till right now; but we'll let her go as she lays—for now. I ain't noways grudgin' anybody what shoots at me, but I sure do hate —— out of a danged head-hunter."

McGill opened his mouth several times, as though searching his soul for placating words, but the three indignant cowpunchers turned and walked outside. McGill went to the door, where he stood for several minutes. Then he sacrificed gain for safety by blowing out his lights and locking his doors.

Brick got his hat at the restaurant, and left Silent and Harp devouring large quantities of ham and eggs. They were both too hungry to question him, and Silent propped his head with one hand while he ate. A lump the size of an egg had raised on the side of his head, which he explored tenderly, as he ate.

Brick had several questions which he wanted to ask Malvene, who lived just at the outskirts of the town in a small cottage.

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Brick knew the place, although he never had been there.

A LIGHT was shining under the drawn curtain of the large front window. Brick picked his way carefully up the narrow graveled walk, with its sidelines of white boulders, until he came to the small porch, which was partly covered by a climbing rose. The porch creaked with the weight of his feet and he listened for a moment before knocking softly on the door.

A tall, angular woman answered Brick's knock, and he asked for Malvene.

"He ain't here right now," she replied, "Want to come in and wait fer him?"

Brick did want to. The woman led him through a narrow, uncarpeted hall and into a living-room, where a shaded oil lamp dimly lighted up the room. Brick glanced around. Hanging on the opposite wall was a large crayon-portrait of a hard-faced man, standing stiffly in all the glory of a frock coat, head thrown back as if challenging the world, and with one hand buried to the wrist inside the buttoned bosom.

Several red plush chairs were placed at regular intervals around the room. A small parlor organ stood in one corner, with an unlighted lamp on each side-bracket. Brick could see an embroidered motto framed on the wall, which showed dimly, "We Mourn Our Loss."

A large chair, with a high back, was beside the table, and as Brick looked around, a man suddenly got up, like a jack-in-a-box and looked at him. He was a dark complexioned, anemic-looking person, wearing heavy glasses. He was collarless and in his shirt-sleeves.

The woman turned to Brick.

"What—I don't believe you spoke yore name."

"No," said Brick, "I don't reckon I did. Yo're Mrs. Malvene, ain't yuh? I thought yuh was. I'm Brick Davidson."

"Oh, yes. Mr. Davidson, meet Mr. Nestor."

"Yeah," drawled Brick, as they shook hands. "Yore the cashier of the bank, ain't yuh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Glad to meetcha, Nestor. I'm the sheriff."

"Oh, yes," replied Nestor vacantly. "Well, won't you sit down."

Brick sat down and leaned back in the chair.

"Down here on a case?" asked Nestor.

"Uh-huh."

"Mr. Nestor rooms and boards with us," volunteered Mrs. Malvene.

"Uh-huh," nodded Brick indifferently.

A moment later Malvene came in. He hurried into the room, but stopped short at the sight of Brick, who was getting out of his chair.

"Well!" he grunted. "Visitor, eh?"

"Not exactly," grinned Brick. "I just wanted to ask yuh what become of Dale's gun. It didn't show up at the inquest."

Malvene squinted his left eye and rubbed the side of his face thoughtfully—

"M-m-m—I dunno, sheriff. Must 'a' got lost in the shuffle."

"What kind of a gun was it?"

"The one Dale had? I ain't sure, but I think it was a .44 or a .45."

"Likely," said Brick dryly.

"Perhaps the robbers took it with them," suggested Nestor.

"What robbers?" asked Brick quickly.

"Why, the—uh—the ones what shot him—the two road-agents."

"Robbers? Was the stage robbed?"

Nestor and Malvene both looked vacantly at Brick.

"There wasn't no robbery," Brick shook his head. "Dale was murdered."

"How do you figure that out?" asked Malvene.

"Why wasn't the stage robbed?" retorted Brick.

"Well," Malvene squinted and pursed his lips, "well, perhaps they got frightened after they killed Dale. Maybe they heard Sawyer coming. You've got to figure things like that, sheriff."

"That," declared Brick, "is just what the murderers aimed to have me do, but I—" Brick turned to Nestor—"You've been handlin' money a long time, ain'tcha?"

Nestor nodded.

"Know good money from bad money?"

"Why—I—I don't know what you mean?" Nestor seemed confused, but interested. "What about bad money, sheriff?"

"Remember the money yuh sent to Marlin City bank the time Romeo Kendall was held up?"

"Yes, I remember it; why?"

"It was all counterfeit when it arrived."

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"Is that a fact?" gasped Malvene.

Nestor dumbly rubbed his chin.

"It sure is," grinned Brick. "Ten thousand dollars in bad money. Who owns the Marlin City bank?"

"I do not know," said Nestor quickly. "Very likely a number of men."

"Know anythin' about the Redrock bank?"

"Not a thing," declared Nestor.

Brick nodded his head and turned toward the door.

"Much obliged, folks. If yuh hear anythin' about that gun of Dale's, lemme know, will yuh, Malvene?"

"Sure I will," nodded Malvene. "If I can help you in any way, let me know, sheriff."

"Yuh never can tell," laughed Brick. "Much obliged."

Brick went outside and walked back toward the street. The trail was still dim, but he was not a bit discouraged. He knew that there was a link between Dale's death and the counterfeit money, and he felt that the pistol in his holster was one of his best bets in unraveling the mystery. The counterfeit business was relegated to the background and he thought only of Dale's death; feeling that the solving of this murder would clear up the other issue. Somewhere was the key to it all.

Brick suspected that Klein, Nebraska and Duggan knew something about it, but none of them was mentally able to conceive ways of flooding the country with bad money, much less manufacture it. Neither was Romeo Kendal nor Buzzard Bailey mentally capable of doing anything which required brains. Somehow, his thoughts reverted to Soapy Caswell. Still, Soapy was no mental giant.

Brick walked slowly back to the street. A man and a woman were coming down the sidewalk, and as they came into the light from a window, he recognized Felix Bray, the banker. They stopped in the shadow of a building and conversed for a moment. Brick stepped back into the alley, and watched. Bray turned and went back the way he had come, and the girl walked slowly past Brick. He watched her go to the alley between Otto's place and a small general store, where she disappeared toward the rear of the saloon. It was Rosie, the singer.

Brick smiled to himself. It was rather amusing to think of the precise Felix Bray in the same breath with a honkatonk girl. Bray was a married man. Brick had seen his wife, who was of the same type as her husband.

"The old son-of-a-gun's steppin' out," smiled Brick. "Mostly all eggs look alike on the outside. Even a stick of dynamite looks kinda nice and slick on the outside, but she's —— inside. I reckon it won't hurt me none to talk to Mr. Bray."

Felix Bray lived in the most pretentious house in Silverton, as befitted his position. It was a remodeled ranchhouse, and was the only house in Silverton which had been painted since Brick could remember.

It was also the only house in Silverton which had any shade trees. This gave it an air of distinction, and also made it difficult of approach in the dark. No light was visible and Brick stumbled over the uneven planks, which had been laid from gate to porch during wet weather. Wet weather and hot sunshine had warped them, until it was like walking along the inside of a giant barrel stave.

Felix Bray answered Brick's knock, carrying a small lamp in his hand, which he held high above his head to illuminate his visitor. Brick did not waste time in generalities.

"Who owns the Marlin City bank, Mr. Bray?"

"Why, I—I am not positive, sheriff; but I have been informed that Mr. Caswell but recently—ah—within the last few months—acquired control of the institution."

"Soapy Caswell? Is that a fact? Who owns the bank at Redrock?"

"I think that is also controlled by Mr. Caswell."

Brick grinned foolishly.

"Soapy's gettin' things kinda corraled, ain't he?"

"Mr. Caswell is investing very wisely, I think," Felix Bray was on the defensive.

"He don't own your bank, does he?"

"He does not. Will you please tell me why you ask these questions, Mr. Davidson?"

"Well," said Brick slowly. "Well, I've asked every other kind of a question and they ain't got me nothin'; so I start in on banks. Does your cashier know that Caswell owns them banks?"

"Mr. Nestor? Certainly he does. Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity," grinned Brick, "curiosity killed a cat oncet upon a time, but there

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ain't no record of it doin' any harm to a red-headed sheriff. Much obliged, Mr. Bray."

"If I can be of any assistance, Mr. Davidson——"

"Yuh never can tell," replied Brick. "Much obliged."

Brick walked slowly back to the main street. He had worked every angle he thought worth while. Nestor had lied. Bray's statement of the ownership of the two banks had let Soapy Caswell out of any duplicity in the business, for the reason that no man would send counterfeit money to his own bank. If Dale was mixed up in the counterfeiting gang—why was he killed? Why had Nestor lied? Brick shook his head, yawned at the moon and headed for the hotel.

"—— delight!" he muttered. "No wonder Sherlock Holmes shot himself full of hop."

BRICK found Harp and Silent in the lobby of the little hotel the next morning. Silent's head was very sore and he was not in the best of humors. They ate breakfast and went to the livery-stable, where they saddled their horses. McKeever was curious to know what they had found out, but they volunteered no information. They rode out of town and headed up the road toward Redrock.

"We don't care where we're goin'," said Silent, after a mile ride. "It's a lot better to be surprized, ain't it, Harp?"

"I ain't never surprized at what Brick does," Harp grinned.

"We're goin' out and take a look at the place where Dale was killed," said Brick. "I've kinda got a hunch."

The road led mostly over high ground, a dusty, rutty highway, with the scanty timbered hills to the left and the heavier foliage farther down in the valley, where willow, poplar and cottonwood took the place of the mesquite and bull-pine, which grew on the hillsides.

Bridges cost money, therefore Sun Dog County roads circled the heads of the ravines, instead of going across them, which made the roads go a long ways to cover short distances.

Brick knew the exact spot, and other evidence bore out the fact that he was right. There were the wheel-marks of the stage on the outer edge of the small grade, while at the upper side were the wheel-marks of Sawyer's rig, where he had crowded into the bank in order to pass the stage.

They swung off their horses. Brick walked along the edge of the grade, looking down into the thick brush, which made a dense fringe beside the road. Suddenly he slid into the brush and came tearing his way out again. In his hand was a Colt pistol. Harp and Silent crowded around him and looked at the gun. Silent's mouth opened in stunned astonishment.

"Mum-my ——!" he gasped. "My gun! Whatcha know?"

"That was my hunch," grinned Brick, looking at the gun.

It was filled with cartridges. It was exactly like all Colt pistols of that model and caliber, except for a spot on the barrel, where Silent had tested the steel with a file. It was not noticeable except to those familiar with the gun.

"What does it mean?" asked Silent wonderingly.

"She was put there for me to find," grinned Brick. "Dale had to have a gun, didn't he? He lost his in the horse-trough." Brick handed Silent the gun.

"Gimme back my gun and wear your own."

Silent exchanged with him, and Brick shoved his own gun into its holster.

"Kind of a case of 'gun, gun, whose gun yuh got?' ain't it?" asked Harp. "We're right where we was before Silent got runty and lost his gun."

Brick grinned and they swung back into their saddles.

"I wish this here gun could talk," said Silent. "I'd sure admire to know who petted me on the head last night. Bein' a deputy sheriff is hy—iu stuff and I like it fine, but I don't like to have folks hammer my head. Brick, yore so awful danged smart—tell me, when do we shoot somebody?"

Brick laughed and swung sideways in his saddle, looking back:

"Mebbe there won't be any shootin', Silent. This here job is goin' to take more brains than bullets, and——"

Came a sound which can only be heard—not described. A hiss, a thud, blending so quickly that one could not tell which sound came first. Brick jerked almost from his saddle, crumpled sideways and fell into a heap, while his horse whirled and clawed it's way up the side of the grade.

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Following the sound of impact came the *whang!* of a rifle, which echoed clatteringly from hill to hill, destroying all chance for Silent and Harp to locate its origin.

Both Silent and Harp were off their horses, guns in hand, almost as quickly as Brick had fallen. Their horses blundered off the grade into the brush, snorting wildly. Silent grasped Brick by the shoulders and dragged him off the road into the brush, where he trampled down a space to lay him down.

"Brains," panted Silent. "Brains, ——!"

"Is he—he dead?" faltered Harp, craning his neck to view the open road below them.

"He is," declared Silent chokingly. "He's too —— dead to skin. Aw-w-w, ——! Lemme find the bushwhacker what fired that shot! I'll eat his ears, Harp; honest I will!"

"I count coup on one of 'em," objected Harp. "The best you can figure on is one lug. ——, I wish I had a rifle."

Their rifles were on their saddles.

The two cowboys strained their ears and eyes, but there were no further shots, no movement. A chickadee danced up and down a dead branch, chattering happily. Down in the brush a family of magpies argued, as only a magpie family can argue; disturbed, no doubt, by the clatter of the rifle shot.

Came a rustling noise behind them, and they both whirled. Brick's arms were spread wide and his hands were opening and shutting spasmodically. His face was purple and his lips fluttered gaspingly.

"Passin' out!" groaned Harp. "Can'tcha think of nothin' to do for him, Silent?"

"Why don't you do somethin'!" snapped Silent. "Standin' there with yore mouth wide open like a fly-trap. My ——, yo're a helpless human, Harp Harris!"

"Can'tcha see he's huntin' for air?" wailed Harp. "Why don'tcha blow in his mouth?"

There was no doubt of this, but neither man seemed capable of starting it. When they did, they started together and bumped heads over Brick's face. Silent's head, being the harder of the two, won out. Silent set his lips over Brick's half-open mouth, after filling his enormous lungs with air, and gave Brick Davidson the benefit of it all.

"My ——, don't bust him!" warned Harp. "Use a little judgment, Silent."

Silent lifted his head and glared at Harp malevolently.

"Who in —— is doin' this blowin', cowboy?"

Before Harp could reply, Brick exhaled—a long, shuddering breath. His lips drew in, his chest seemed to jerk, but this time he inhaled without assistance. The purple seemed to drain from his face and a chalky hue took its place.

"Hear him rattle?" whispered Harp. "Folks always rattle thataway before they die."

"Rattlesnakes rattle before they strike, too," reminded Silent.

Brick drew his arms in across his abdomen, stretched his full length and then turned over on his belly, bracing himself with one elbow. Silent and Harp watched him in awed silence. There was no doubt but what Brick Davidson was a very sick man. Finally he turned over weakly and blinked at Harp and Silent.

"You—you ain't dyin', are yuh, Brick?" faltered Harp.

Brick's whisper was faint, but plainly audible—

"I—I hope so."

Harp and Silent exchanged looks of relief.

"It ain't so bad to die, when yuh hope yuh will," sighed Harp.

Silent nodded solemnly and edged in closer to Brick.

"Didja get hit in the stummick, Brick?"

Brick's eyes opened and he squinted at Silent. Then he raised slowly and painfully to a sitting position and looked around.

"What in —— happened, anyway?" he gasped.

"Yo're shot," declared Silent nervously. "Somebody shot yuh plumb off yore bronc, Brick."

Brick frowned and looked down at his waist-line. His fingers fumbled at his belt and he straightened out to get a better look. His cartridge-belt was fastened with a heavy, ornate buckle, heavy steel, which had been stamped with an intricate design.

The top of the buckle had been torn away by the bullet.

"Plumb through the stummick," whispered Silent.

Brick painfully pulled his shirt loose, disclosing a black-and-blue spot about the size of a silver dollar. The skin was bruised but not broken. Brick grinned painfully and took a deep breath.

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"The old belt-buckle stopped it from goin' plumb through me. Ow! Danged if that ain't sore as a boil."

"You was turned kinda antegodlin' in yore saddle, too," said Harp happily. "That helped yuh a lot, Brick. Lookin' backward sure saved yore life, red-headed cowboy."

"Feller can't ride thataway all the time though," complained Silent. "That bushwhackin' whippoorwill likely thinks he's handed one of us a harp. Yuh got to hand it to him for a dead-center shot. Let's round up them broncs."

"Not me," declared Brick. "I'm goin' to set here and suck in good air for a while. Never will catch up, I reckon. I feel kinda upset, don'tcha know it?"

"Yuh do look kinda peaked," admitted Silent thoughtfully. "They picked on my head and they selected yore stummick, and now I wonder where they'll——"

Silent glanced around Harp, who was sitting against a mesquite, with his hands cupped over his mouth, playing softly on his jew's-harp.

Silent shook his head sadly—

"Harp, if I ever catch you unconscious——"

Harp grinned, wiped the back of his hand across his lips and got to his feet:

"Don't brag about hittin' folks when they're down, Silent. Let's find them broncs."

Their horses had become tangled in the brush and were not hard to secure. There was no further sign of the bushwhacker, but they took no unnecessary chances.

Brick got painfully into his saddle. He was still sick and weak, but thankful that it was no worse than a bruise and a shock. He swung his horse off the grade and headed southeast, in the general direction of which the bullet must have come.

"Spread out," ordered Brick. "Don't give anybody a chance to shoot at more than one of us."

They separated about a hundred yards apart and rode slowly. Clumps of mesquite, scattering groups of willows and a few cottonwoods dotted the broken hills. Cattle were ranging through this bunch of hills, the Nine Bar Nine and Circle Cross brands predominating.

Three coyotes trotted into the open, took one look at the riders, and faded away like three blurred streaks. Farther on a white-tail deer stepped gracefully out of a clump of cottonwoods. An instant later it flashed away into the trees, flag held high.

Under ordinary conditions the coyotes would have been greeted with a hail of pistol bullets, fired more for effect than for injury; while the deer would have been followed for a mile or so by a yelling rider, who hoped to get near enough to cast a lariat. But these three riders gave no heed to coyote or deer, riding straight ahead, guns swinging in their hands.

The wide valley narrowed to a pass, below which stretched the range-land of the Circle Cross. Southwest of this pass, hidden by ranges of rolling hills, was Silverton. The three riders gathered at the top of the pass.

"That bushwhacker likely pulled his freight out of there right after he fired that shot," said Silent. "He was sure he nailed Brick and he didn't wait any longer."

"Like huntin' for a whisper in a big wind," complained Harp. "Where do we go now, Brick?"

"Circle Cross," replied Brick. "I've got to have a talk with Soapy Caswell."

"Do yuh suspicion Soapy?" asked Silent, as they spurred down the hill, but Brick did not heed Silent's question. Harp grinned at Silent and Silent's mouth opened in a silent laugh. They were both tired of following Brick around while he asked questions, and craved action. There were men at the Circle Cross who were likely willing to act swiftly.

Duggan would not forget that Silent had used him as a bullet shield; and Duggan was a reputed gunman. Possibly they would run across Klein. The thought of it permeated the soul of Silent Slade, and he lifted his voice in song:

"She-e-e never came ba-a-a-ck, she-e-e never came ba-a-a-ck, be-e-e-yu-u-u-te-e-ful Rosie O'Neil.
My tear drops are fa-a-a-llin', my heart is ca-a-a-llin' for my won-n-n-der-r-r-r-ful Rosie O'Neil."

Harp spurred in closer to Brick.

"And that whipoorwill has the gall to kick about jew's-harp music, Brick! Ain't some folks got queer ears?"

Brick did not even turn his head. He was thinking of just where to begin. The guilty parties were beginning to show their hand, because they knew he was uncovering some of the evidence, but Brick was not at all sure of what he had uncovered. The finding of Silent's pistol proved that Dale

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had been murdered, and that at the time of the murder the guilty parties had neglected to plant evidence which would point to the fact that Dale was killed for resisting a holdup. But why was Dale killed? Where was the counterfeit money coming from? Was Felix Bray——

Brick pulled his hat lower over his eyes and grinned to himself.

THE Circle Cross was a trifle more pretentious than the usual Sun Dog ranch. Soapy Caswell had started to build the ranch-house of brick; but it took too long to haul it over heavy roads, and he felt satisfied with half-brick and half-lumber, making it look like a frame building on a tall, brick foundation. A wide veranda, sans railing, extended around the north and east sides.

A collection of stunted trees were planted in orderly lines in the front yard, half-smothered in patches of timothy hay. Down the slope from the house was the bunk-house. The barn was a huge structure, and was almost surrounded with pole corrals. The Circle Cross ranch buildings almost filled the space at the mouth of a dry ravine, and commanded a broad view of the range. There was nothing to recommend it in Summer, and the Winter winds had free sway, as they swept up from the North. A huge gate, with an arched top, opened from beside the road.

They rode in through the big gate at the Circle Cross and up to the bunk-house, where some one was playing on a banjo. They dismounted and opened the door.

Nebraska Yocum was tilted back in a chair with the banjo on his lap, while seated on the edge of a bunk, his right arm in a sling, was Curley Klein.

Klein glared vacantly at the three men, but did not speak. Nebraska unhooked his heels from the rungs of his chair, and tossed the banjo on to the bunk.

"Hi-yah, sheriff," he said pleasantly. "How come yuh wanders so far away from home? Come in, can'tcha?"

Brick grinned and shook his head.

"Lookin' for Soapy Caswell. Is he home today?"

"Yeah, he's up in the house, I reckon. What's he done?"

Brick shook his head.

"I dunno—yet. Where's Duggan?"

"Duggan?" Nebraska pondered the question deeply. "I'm danged if I know, sheriff. I'm the foreman—not a keeper."

Klein said nothing. His averted face was purple with rage against Silent Slade, who was grinning broadly at him.

"Didja ever find that gun, Klein?" asked Harp innocently.

Klein shot Harp a malevolent glance, but did not speak.

"Funny thing," mused Brick aloud. "Somebody hit Silent on the head the other night, took his gun away from him, and today I found it in the brush where Dale was killed."

"Silent's gun?" Nebraska looked queerly at Brick, who nodded. "Yessir. Whatcha know about that? They took his gun because it was inside his shirt, but they left the gun they wanted, which was in Silent's holster."

Brick laughed loudly. Silent and Harp grinned, but Nebraska and Klein did not seem to see the joke.

"Well, I've got to see Soapy," said Brick. "After I find out a few things which he knows I'm goin' to put Dale's murderers behind the bars."

"I reckon Soapy's up at the house," said Nebraska absently. "Was there a while ago."

"Much obliged," nodded Brick, and the three of them turned around and went up to the spacious ranch-house.

Just as they reached the rambling porch Soapy Caswell came out of the front door. He scowled at Brick, but Brick grinned widely at him.

"Howdy, Mr. Caswell."

"Howdy, ——!" grunted Soapy. "Any time you come talkin' Mister stuff to me I'm warned. What's on yore vacant mind?"

Brick sat down on the steps and produced the makings of a cigaret, and Soapy, after a grunt of disgust, sat down near him. Silent and Harp squatted on their heels beside the house.

"Go ahead and uncinch," grunted Soapy, squinting sideways at Brick, but Brick finished his cigaret before he spoke.

"If they don't stop makin' bad money in Sun Dog county, yore goin' broke, Soapy."

Soapy Caswell owned a real "poker-face," but his nose twitched for a moment. He spat dryly and squinted off across the hills.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah," replied Brick.

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"That," said Soapy slowly, "that is a copper-riveted cinch, Brick. Didja think I didn't know it?"

"I reckoned yuh did," nodded Brick. "I never knowed a thing about it until the other day. Why wasn't I told?"

Soapy took a fresh chew and settled himself against a post.

"It's a Gov'ment case, sheriff. Yo're all right when she comes to smokin' up rustlers and such critters, but this here bad-money job requires—brains."

"Oh!" grunted Brick.

Silent and Harp chuckled joyously, but Soapy Caswell's face was devoid of humorous intent.

"Whatcha doin'—waitin' for brains to grow?" asked Brick, after a few moments' silence.

Soapy shook his head.

"Nope."

"Brains ain't savin' much money for you, are they?"

Soapy spat violently and shook his head.

"Can't say they are, Brick. 'Pears that she's a delicate thing to handle. I ain't sayin' you can't run yore own office, but they seems to opine that yuh might get to b'ilin' around and chase 'em away. The U. S. A. wants them mockin'-birds plumb bad, and the only way to get 'em is to let 'em think they're gettin' away with the job. They'll uncover pretty soon. *Sabe?*"

"By the time yore two banks are busted, Soapy. Where do you get off?"

"I dunno," admitted Soapy sadly. "I'm leavin' it all to Jim Clelland, the U. S. marshal at Helena. I ain't heard from him for a week, but he told me that things was comin' along as well as yuh could expect."

"Who do yuh reckon it is?" asked Brick.

"Me? Huh! Say, if I even thought I knowed—" Soapy shook his head. "Got me hawg-tied, so they have. She's a cinch that it's two fellers, and they're slicker than grease."

The four men sat silently for a while, and then Brick said—

"Soapy, how much was stole from the stage the day Dale was killed?"

"Seven thousand dollars. I found out that day that the ten thousand in counterfeit had been in the Marlin City bank. If I'd 'a' known about it before I wouldn't 'a' taken the chance of sendin' that seven thousand to Redrock."

"When did yuh first find out about the bad money?"

"'Bout four months ago. Seems that Malvene got wise to some danged rich copper property over in Sunset Valley, and he wanted me to go in with him on the deal. I gave him four thousand dollars in bills. He didn't want to carry the money with him; so he went to the bank at Silverton to get a draft." Soapy shook his head sadly. "He didn't get it. The cashier told him the money was phony. Malvene hunted me up and took me over to the bank, and the cashier showed me that it was counterfeit—every —— cent of it!"

"Where did yuh get it?" asked Brick.

"Redrock bank. I went up there afterward and we examined every danged cent of currency, but it was all O. K. Since then there's been pieces of bad money scattered all around. Pelham got some, Otto got some. I've won it in poker games and got it in change at the stores. Five, ten and twenty dollar bills."

"Does anybody else know that there was money stolen the day Dale was killed?"

Soapy shook his head.

"Nope. The cashier of the Redrock bank sent me a note."

Soapy took out an old bill-fold and removed a dirty piece of wrapping-paper.

"This was all there was in the money box."

Brick took the paper, on which was printed in pencil:

AS LONG AS YOU'RE WISE THERE'S NO USE SHOVING THE QUEER. THANKS FOR THE DONATION. (Signed) THE GANG.

Brick studied the penciled note for a time and handed it to Silent and Harp, who read it and gave it back to Soapy.

"When yuh goin' to ship some more money, Soapy?"

Soapy stared at Brick for a moment and spat disgustedly.

"Never! Nossir! Pack it m'self after this, y'betcha."

Brick laughed and shook his head.

"No, yo're wrong there, Soapy. Tomorrow yo're goin' to make a big shipment. You go to the bank and tell Felix Bray that yo're shippin'—uh—you fix up the amount so she'll look natural. Send her out on the stage and I'll do the rest."

Soapy scratched his cheek, looked sideways at Brick and spat reflectively.

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"Say yuh will, eh? Big shipment of money, did yuh say? Whose money—mine? Not by a —— sight! Them elegant road-agents won't get no more wallops at my dinero, y'betcha. What's yore brilliant idea, Brick?"

"My idea?" Brick grinned thoughtfully. "Why, I was just aimin' to catch 'em, Soapy. Don't yuh want 'em caught, or is it some kind of a game, where they won't be no good unless some hired hand of Uncle Sam catches 'em?"

"Usin' my money for bait, eh?" sarcastically.

Brick dug his heel into the dry ground and nodded his head.

"Uh-huh. I kinda reckon it will be good fishin', Soapy. Can yuh put yoreself out that much?"

Soapy studied Brick for a while and then looked at Harp and Silent, who were humped up in the shade smoking slowly.

"I'm handlin' the pay-roll of the Whipoorwill camp," stated Soapy slowly. "It's at Silverton now, and I was kinda wonderin' just how I'm goin' to get it to the mines. Due there tomorrow night. Nobody knows it. She's in the safe at the bank, and she's had me guessin' how to ship it safe."

"That pay-roll is about fifteen thousand dollars," mused Brick. "That'll do real well, I reckon."

"Tell me yore idea, will yuh?" asked Soapy. "I don't want to——"

"Nope." Brick was emphatic.

"Too many minds thinkin' on the same thing will ruin it. You furnish the money and I'll do the rest. You tell 'em at the bank to hand the stage-driver the money and I'll see that she gets through."

Soapy nodded slowly.

"All right, Brick. I hate like —— to do it, but I reckon I'll gamble a little with yuh. Did yuh find out anythin' about who killed that Dale feller?"

"I'm thinkin' about him a lot," admitted Brick seriously. "That's the —— of sending a city man into a cow country to compete with range outlaws. Mebbe Dale was a good detective, but——"

"Did Pelham tell yuh?" asked Soapy quickly.

Brick grinned and shook his head.

"Nope. Deducted most of it m'self, Soapy. Made a good guess and you told me I was right. Pelham hired him, when the U. S. marshal sent him in to smell out the bad-money business. You fellers make me plumb tired. Ought to arrest all of yuh for blockin' the wheels of progress. C'mon, boys."

SOAPY had nothing to say, but sat on his porch and watched the three men mount and ride slowly out of the place. Harp and Silent said nothing until out of earshot and then Harp said,

"Klein rode away a while ago, Brick. Saw him swing in behind the cuttin' corral and drop into that dry coulee. Mebbe he went toward town. Nebrasky has been watchin' us from the bunk-house window all the time. Reckon Klein went out the back window."

Brick laughed.

"They're gettin' all het up, I reckon. Well, they ought to."

He spurred into a gallop and the others followed him. They swept around the grades, riding bunched as they headed for Silverton.

The first part of the ride was around sharp curves, where the three horses crowded shoulder to shoulder to keep on the grade. None of the three men made any comment, and rode with their hats pulled low, swinging free in their saddles. Suddenly they struck a long stretch of straight road, which led along the slope of a timbered hill. Far beyond them they could see an object lying in the middle of the road. As they drew closer they could see it was a blanket-roll, lying in the middle of the road, as though some one had lost it. They instinctively drew rein to stop and investigate, but Brick suddenly drove his spurs home, whirled his horse off the road, as he yelled:

"Don't stop! Split up and ride like ——!"

Harp and Silent obeyed like a flash, whirling off the grade, each swinging wide of the other and following in the general direction taken by Brick.

From above them on the hill came the spiteful *"whang!"* of a rifle and the bullet ricocheted off a rock in front of Harp. Another rifle joined in the chorus and bullets buzzed like angry bees around the three running horses. A running horse is a difficult target, especially when the shooter is over-anxious, and the three horses swept through a clump of cottonwoods out of view from the hillside.

Beyond this clump of cottonwoods which

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fringed a dry water-course, was open, flat country, sparsely covered with clumps of small brush. The cottonwoods extended in a broken line for a hundred yards or more, filled with a tangle of briars and willows.

On the opposite side, beyond the road, the mesquite and rock-covered hill sloped gently for several hundred yards, broken here and there with deep gashes, brush-filled. The ambushers had picked a desirable site for their work; but had overlooked the fact that Brick, or some of the others, might be suspicious.

Brick slid off his horse, drew his rifle from its scabbard and darted back into the cottonwoods, followed in a moment by Harp and Silent. They watched the side of the hill for quite a while, unrewarded by anything which looked like a human being.

"They tried to fox us," grunted Brick. "Knowed we'd stop to see what was in that bundle and they'd have a standin' shot at us."

"How did yuh get wise to it?" asked Harp admiringly.

"Looked too good," grinned Brick. "Could yuh imagine any man losin' his blanket-roll like that? Nope, they made it too danged good. Oh, o-o-o-o-oh!"

Brick squinted his eyes sharply and slid his peep-sight up to the last notch. A moment later the .45-70 roared and Brick ducked low under the cloud of smoke and peered at the side of the hill.

"—— the luck!" he swore feelingly. "Got the horse instead of the rider."

"Make me mad if I missed a man at seven hundred yards," agreed Silent seriously. "Yuh ought to practise more, Brick."

A bullet spattered a handful of leafy foliage on to their hats, and all three of them fired back at a puff of smoke from the side of the hill. Then they ducked down in the brush and ran fifty feet farther down the cover, grinning at each other as they heard bullets ripping into the trees near where they had fired.

Again they fired at a spot just below the haze of powder smoke on the hill, but without visible results.

"Aw-w-w, this ain't no fun," grumbled Silent. "Let's spread out and sneak up on 'em. I want to notch m' sights on one of them jaspers. Got any idea who it is, Brick?"

"I reckon it's our friend Duggan doin' most of the shootin', assisted to the best of his ability by Klein. Let's go and smoke 'em out."

They sneaked out of the brush, crawling on hands and knees, and taking advantage of every bit of cover until they reached the road. A bullet slapped into the dust in front of Silent, filling his eyes with sand and his soul with bitterness.

"Gosh blasted chuckwallas!" he snorted, digging both fists into his eyes to wipe away the tears.

"Little sand won't hurt yuh," was all the comfort he got from Harp, who hugged a bush and grinned widely. A bullet cut through the top of the bush, and Harp rolled away to another and larger cover.

Brick's rifle roared once. Silence for a count of ten, and then there began a popping like an automatic.

"By the horns on a toad, I got that hombre!" announced Brick as he slammed shells into the loading-gate of his rifle: "There they go!"

He fired three times more, but failed to score.

"Gone over the hill," he yelled, "but they left one of 'em for a nest-egg. C'mon."

Silent and Harp got to their feet and followed him cautiously up the hill. It was at least five hundred yards to where they found a roan horse lying on its side in a tangle of brush, and about fifty yards beyond that lay the body of a man. They turned him over, squatting low in the mesquite to guard against any long shots fired from the ridge.

Brick gave a whistle of astonishment as he looked at the face of the dead man.

"Ed Sawyer!" grunted Silent, "Whatcha know about that?"

Sawyer owned a small ranch between Silverton and Redrock, on Camp Creek, where he owned the Lazy S brand. He had minded his own business and was known as a silent man, even in a land where men do not usually talk to any great extent.

Brick studied him for a while and got to his feet.

"We'll pack him down to the road, boys. We can rope him to my horse and I'll double up with Harp."

"Where does he come in on this deal?" asked Harp slowly. "Think there's goin' to be any trouble over snuffin' him out?"

"He was in bad company," replied Brick, "and I reckon he had it comin' to

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im. You wanted action, cowboy; so lon't yelp at a puny little start like this. ilent, me and you will pack him down, vhile Harp watches the ridge real close-ike. I sure hate to have lead whisperin' round my back."

It was a difficult task to carry the body lown the hill. Mesquite and rocks and oose gravel made the footing uncertain, nd there was the added danger of a shot rom the top of the hill.

Brick and Silent grunted and slid with heir burden, while Harp staggered side-vays most of the time, slewing around over he brush and rocks and trying to keep his vision somewhere near a focus on the sky-ine of the ridge.

"Never mind 'em," grunted Silent jerkily to Harp. "Nobody could ever hit us, un-less they was sufferin' from St. Vitus dance."

Harp glanced at Silent and tripped over a boulder, which caused a wonderful flow of profanity toward the laboring Silent.

"Don't talk to the guard," grunted Brick, whose hat had jerked down over one eye, where it hung rakishly, causing him to keep his eyes on the sky in order not to lose the hat completely.

They reached their horses, tied the body on Brick's horse and headed back for town, keeping off the main road for fear of another ambush.

The town of Silverton evinced great interest in their coming, especially when they found that Ed Sawyer was the victim.

Many questions were hurled at Brick, who shut his lips tight and refused to talk about it. There was no question but that it was a peculiar situation, viewing it from Silverton's angle. Even in the West it is not a common practise for a sheriff to bring in a dead man and refuse to talk concerning his demise.

Silent and Harp followed Brick's lead and kept mum. Doctor Bridger took charge of the body, after pronouncing Sawyer dead; which required little examination. Soapy Caswell rode in shortly after the disposal of the body. Nebraska Yocum came with him, and a little later Klein appeared, carrying his right arm in a sling.

Buck Pelham found Brick and his party in the restaurant, eating copious portions of ham and eggs.

"Set down and have a aig," begged Silent, but Buck declined the invitation. Buck seemed to have something on his mind; something which he hated to mention; but he finally spoke—

"How come yuh to smoke up Sawyer?"

"Return of compliments," smiled Brick.

"What for, Brick?"

"What for?" Brick halted a forkful of food just short of his mouth and stared at Buck.

"General principles, I reckon."

"Kinda —— funny," mused Buck. "Sawyer seemed like a decent sort of a hombre and never bothered nobody."

"Prob'ly," nodded Brick. " 'F he had he likely wouldn't 'a' lasted as long as he did."

Buck nervously shifted his feet.

"I ain't talkin' my own opinions, yuh understand; and I don't want yuh to take this as comin' from me; but I'm advisin' yuh to tell folks why yuh killed Sawyer—if yuh killed him."

Brick glanced sharply at Buck.

"You mean that Silverton is takin' this thing to heart, Buck?"

"Kinda. They naturally wants to know."

"Well," grinned Brick, "I've got to find out first."

At this moment Doctor Bridger and Felix Bray came into the restaurant and headed for Brick's table. Both men seemed excited as they nodded to Buck. Bray spoke directly to Brick.

"There seems to be considerable—er—speculation as to why you—uh—" Bray seemed at a loss for further words.

"Try it again," advised Silent.

"The reasons for the killing of Mr. Sawyer?" queried Brick.

Both men nodded. Brick pursed his lips, speculated for a moment and then got to his feet.

"I had one —— good reason for killin' him. He shot and missed—I didn't miss. Now, you —— old ladies can go home and gossip about it, and mebbe you'll find out why he shot at me."

"Now, now!" soothed Bridger. "That's no way——"

"Well, what in —— are you goin' to do about it?"

Brick's mop of unruly hair fairly bristled, and the freckles on his face looked like silver flecks in the yellow light. Bridger and Bray turned away nervously and walked out of the door. Buck got slowly to his feet.

"Brick, you know I'm yore friend; and as

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a friend I'm askin' yuh to come over to Otto's place and tell 'em about it. There's a lot of nasty talk which yuh can nip in the bud."

"Tryin' to scare me, Buck?"

"Gimme credit for havin' a little sense."

Buck went slowly out of the door, while Brick, Silent and Harp looked foolishly at each other. Silent grinned widely at the prospect of trouble. Harp absent-mindedly produced his jew's-harp and twanged a few sonorous notes before realizing where he was. Brick was serious. Silverton wanted a reason for the fight with Sawyer; and Brick could give no plausible reason. Would Silverton believe that Sawyer would shoot at Brick just to be shooting? They would not. Brick had produced the effect; but the cause was unknown, except for a surmise, which no jury in the world would consider.

"That's the —— of bein' a sheriff," complained Brick.

"Silverton ain't never wormed itself into my heart," said Silent, "and I ain't goin' into mournin' for any of the population which garners a harp and feathery wings from hornin' into our affairs."

"When," said Harp, peering at Brick hopefully, "when do we kill somebody?"

"This town is too danged full of question marks," declared Brick. "We're goin' to the stable, fork our broncs and pull out for Marlin City—right now."

"Aw-w-w!" wailed Silent. "Don'tcha feel good, Brickie? Walk out and leave a chance for a lot of fun?"

"We ain't wishful to be rough," sighed Harp. "We're just a li'l social organization, tryin' to get along with the rest of the doves."

Brick shrugged his shoulders and walked over to the counter, where he paid for their meals. Harp and Silent went out behind him, walking with their hats in their hands, like men going to the funeral of a dear friend.

They passed a number of people on the street, but no one seemed to want to talk to them. Silverton seemed to be tuning up for it's regular nightly amusements, and both Silent and Harp looked longingly at the lighted windows as they passed.

McKeever was grooming a horse by the light of a lantern as they came in. He looked at them solemnly, but said nothing, as they brought out their horses. Brick handed him the stable fee and McKeever thanked him almost in a whisper.

"Goin' home," stated Brick.

"Yeah?" queried McKeever.

Brick made no further explanation. They saddled their horses and Brick led them straight through town, heading for Marlin City. A number of men saw them ride out through the lighted street; but no one accosted them. A mile out of town Brick drew rein and dismounted.

Behind them a clump of stunted cottonwoods silhouetted against the sky. The point of a butte, like the prow of a giant battle-ship, cut them off from the lights of Silverton. Brick squatted beside the road and began to roll a cigaret.

Silent's saddle creaked as he got slowly off his horse, and a moment later Harp dismounted. They both humped down beside Brick.

"We'll stay here until about midnight," stated Brick.

"And then what do we aim to do?" asked Harp.

"I'm goin' to start elimination proceedin's," declared Brick. "Silverton is goin' to love me like a brother, or hate me like ——. M' brain is tired from travelin' tangled trails; so now I start usin' m' hands."

BUZZARD BAILEY and Romeo Kendall slept in a small room off the stage stable. The stable door was not locked; neither was the door leading from the stable into the bunk-room. Buzzard Bailey awoke from sweet dreams to find the cold muzzle of a six-shooter against his neck.

The lamp was lit, and Buzzard noted that the six-gun was held in Brick Davidson's right hand. He also noted that Romeo was looking goggle-eyed into the muzzle of Silent Slade's gun, while Harp Harris adjusted the oil lamp.

"What's the matter?" stammered Buzzard, as Harp picked up a coiled lariat rope and dropped it over Buzzard's shoulders. Harp worked swiftly but thoroughly and in a few moments Buzzard Bailey was trussed so well that only his tongue could move freely. Another coil of rope assured complete inactivity from the gawping Romeo.

"What the —— do you think yore doin'?"

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growled Buzzard, trying to conceal his fears under a threatening exterior.

"I don't trust you two hombres," smiled Brick.

"I never done nothin' to you," whined Buzzard.

"You insulted my intelligence," declared Brick. "Next time you testify to a murder—tell the truth."

Buzzard stared at Brick. It put Buzzard in a bad position. He was forced to look straight at Brick and try to swallow his fears; whereas, if his hands had been loose, he might have covered a lot of it by rubbing his chin or scratching his head.

"What did I—I say?" he faltered.

"You had that murderer shootin' from below the grade."

"Well, what if I did? That wasn't my fault."

"Dale was on the seat with you?"

"He sure as —— was!" Buzzard was very positive. In fact he was almost belligerent in his declaration.

"Then," drawled Brick, "why did the bullet range downward?"

Buzzard stared at Brick for a moment, shifted his eyes to Silent and Harp and then looked down at the floor. He wet his dry lips with a still more dry tongue, and in the silence the rasping was audible.

"You spoke yore little piece, Buzzard; and it's goin' to put a rope around your neck."

"My ——!" gasped Romeo, his face a pale green in the light from the small lamp.

"Prayin' or cussin'?" queried Silent dryly.

"I ain't lied about nothin'," wailed Romeo.

"Then yuh ain't got no wail comin'," smiled Brick; "but for fear yuh might—we're goin' to camp right with yuh."

"Somebody is goin' to pay for this!" growled Buzzard.

"I'm kinda figurin' on taking up a collection," admitted Brick.

The stage to Marlin City and the Whipoorwill mines was due to leave at seven o'clock in the morning. At six-fifty, Brick and Silent harnessed the four horses to the stage. Buzzard and Romeo, still trussed, were propped up on a seat inside the vehicle, while Silent and Harp sat opposite them. Brick mounted the driver's seat, wearing Romeo's flopping sombrero, and drove to the front of the stage-office.

Malvene came out of the office and up to the stage, before he recognized Brick, who was grinning at him.

"What's the idea?" Malvene stared up at Brick.

"Thought I'd show yuh how to make this stage-line pay." Brick pointed down at the body of the stage. "Look at the passengers I picked up."

Malvene peered inside. Silent and Harp grinned at him; but Malvene only looked at the trussed prisoners, and up at Brick for an explanation.

"Malvene," seriously, "I think these are the two men who have been robbin' yore stages."

Malvene smiled skeptically—

"What proof have you?"

"Not a danged bit," admitted Brick sadly. "Mebbe that Romeo person is innocent; but I've kinda cinched some of the Dale killin' onto Buzzard, and he'll have to buck like —— to shake it off. Buzz will likely talk about it, when I gets him in jail."

Malvene seemed undecided for a moment, and then:

"Well, it's none of my business, but you can't use my stage to haul prisoners in. There's plenty of rigs you can get. I'll take charge of the stage."

"Thasall right," admitted Brick. "If I pick up more passengers I'll make these walk. I'm the best stage-driver yuh ever seen. So-long."

Brick kicked off the brake and the restive team swung off up the street to the bank, where Brick stopped them. Felix Bray was evidently watching for the stage, and came out when it stopped. He was carrying a canvas-covered bundle, which he handed up to Brick before he recognized him.

"Want me to put this into the treasure-box?" asked Brick.

Bray stared at Brick foolishly.

"Howdy, Mister Bray," said Silent sticking his head out of the window.

Bray stepped in closer and peered inside.

"Goin' to make it plumb miserable for anybody what tries to steal this shipment," grinned Brick. "Giddap, broncs."

Brick realized that he had not signed for the money, and that the loss of it would brand him as a thief; but he only grinned and snapped the long whip over the lead team.

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About a mile from town the road dipped into a dry wash, which was a tangle of willows and rose bushes. He swung the team off the road, following the dry water-course until he was able to conceal the stage from the road.

Silent and Harp asked no questions, but followed Brick's order to unhitch the team, which they tied to the willows. Brick tested the bonds of his prisoners, rolled them each a cigaret, picked up the package of money and started toward Silverton, taking a short-cut across the hills.

Silent and Harp grumbled audibly, but followed cheerfully. They knew Brick was leading them back to town—and the town meant trouble. As they topped a high knoll they could see a string of horsemen stringing along the road toward Silverton. It was impossible to distinguish individual riders at that distance, but there was something significant in the fact that over a dozen horsemen were riding together at this time of the morning.

"Whatcha make of that, Brick?" asked Silent.

Brick rubbed his nose thoughtfully.

"I reckon it's lucky that we didn't go to Marlin last night, and also that we turned off at the dry-wash. Them jiggers are lookin' for us."

"For the demise of Sawyer?" Harp was indignant.

"Uh-huh. Bunch of want-to-knows."

"More the merrier," chuckled Silent. "I've got two guns and so has Brick. Five times six is how many? Thirty, ain't it?"

"I don't reckon there'll be any fightin'," replied Brick.

"I'm goin' to batter —— out of you if there ain't," declared Silent. "You sure are liable to a trimmin', cowboy."

IF SILVERTON was a sleepy village when the stage left, it had surely changed in less than an hour. At least twenty horses were tied to the hitch-rack, and an overflow crowd seemed to be trying to get into the stage-office.

Brick had led Silent and Harp in a round-about way to get into town; for he was taking no chances in appearing boldly in the street. They came in on the west side of town, behind Otto's place, without being seen by any one.

Brick stopped at the inside edge of the board sidewalk, between Otto's place and the blacksmith shop. Silent and Harp crowded in behind him and watched the crowd up the street. Nebraska Yocum and Snookie Duggan rode in and joined the crowd.

"Ain't even standin' room in that place," grunted Brick. " 'Pears to me that it might be worth listenin' to."

"If yuh wants to use yore ears—I've got a idea," grinned Silent. "I was up on that buildin' last Fourth of July and sat on the edge of the front, when the rodeo was on. There's a fence back there, which makes it a cinch to get on to the roof, and there's a kind of a trap-door up there, which they keeps open to give 'em air."

"Yo're worth all the trouble I've had in raisin' yuh," grinned Brick. "C'm on."

They circled the rear of Otto's place and reached the high fence, which connected with the rear of Pelham and Malvene's building. It was easy to climb to the roof, midway of which was a ventilating-trap, half raised. They tiptoed over to the trap and squatted on their heels. The conversation was plainly audible. Malvene was talking.

"Where do you suppose they turned off the road?"

"Is this a supposin' meetin'?" boomed the voice of "Slim" Hunter, foreman of the Crescent outfit.

A jumble of voices took up the matter, but stopped as Malvene continued.

"It is a sure thing that they did not go to Marlin City last night."

"That's a —— wise remark." Banty Harrison's remark drew a laugh from the men who had tried to find Brick in Marlin City.

Felix Bray's precise voice followed the laugh:

"They have sixteen thousand and eighty dollars in currency with them. I gave it to the driver before I recognized who he was."

"Don'tcha worry about yo're money, Mister," drawled Jim Neeley, the blacksmith. "Brick Davidson may smoke yuh up with his six-gun; but he ain't no danged thief."

"The money is gone," declared Bray. "The stage never went to Marlin City. You can not blame me——"

"If she turned off the road, we'll find the tracks," declared Slim. "That won't be hard to do, if yo're lookin' for 'em."

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"Well, ——, that ain't the first money to be stole around here."

Brick recognized Soapy's voice. Several men laughed.

"Let's find that stage," suggested Slim. "All this talk about stolen money, mavericked stages and killin' folks without a reason ain't gettin' us no place. If we find Brick we'll sure find out somethin'—if it ain't more than findin' out that we've been in a —— of a fight. Come on."

There was a general exodus toward the door. Brick opened the trap and peered inside. He placed the package of money on the roof, swung down inside and dropped as light as a cat to the floor. Silent and Harp followed him.

Men were mounting at the hitch-rack. Malvene, Bray and Soapy were just outside the door, watching the men. Nebraska and Duggan were standing on the edge of the sidewalk, making no move to get their horses. Several of the men rode away from the front of the building. Soapy turned from Bray and Malvene and started up the street. Nebraska and Duggan, instead of going to their horses, turned and came back toward the door.

Brick and his men made no move. Suddenly the small door at the rear opened and Klein stepped inside. He shut the door softly and took several steps toward the men before he saw who they were. Then he froze in his tracks.

Klein had been a killer; but just now he realized that finis had been written at the bottom of his record. His right arm was helpless, and he knew he was not a left-handed pistol shot. He slowly licked his lips as he stared at the three hard-faced men, who were making no move.

Klein's eyes flashed to the window, and he grinned wolfishly as he saw Nebraska and Duggan coming toward the door. They stopped in the doorway and spoke to Malvene and Bray. Klein's lips twitched and with a strangled cry of warning, he threw himself sideways, trying to fall behind Malvene's desk, and clawing left-handed for his gun.

Harp's wrist flipped swiftly and his big Colt thundered in the confines of the small room. Klein dropped out of sight behind the desk, leaving a pair of twitching legs in sight.

At Klein's warning cry, Nebraska and Duggan drew their guns and whirled in the doorway. The crash of Harp's shot was echoed by the splitting reports of four guns, as Nebraska and Duggan met the challenge of the law.

Such swift shooting is not usually deadly. A bullet tore into the wall two feet from Brick's head, while another ripped through the side of Silent's boot. Both Brick and Silent were shooting slower—shooting through a pall of powder smoke at indistinct figures, which staggered drunkenly back to the sidewalk, spouting smoke from their hips.

Suddenly one of the figures went down, sprawling under the smoke. The other turned and started away. Brick sprang through the doorway and almost fell to the sidewalk. His left leg was numb and his left arm seemed full of needles, but he laughed and fired his last shot at Duggan, who had reached his horse and whirled to shoot.

Duggan dropped his gun, grasped for the saddle; but his hand groped at empty air and he sprawled under the belly of his frightened horse, which tore away from the rack and galloped away.

A bullet whizzed past Brick's head, and he turned to see Malvene shooting at him from the middle of the street. Brick shook his head to clear his vision and his groping hand came in contact with the butt of Romeo's pistol, which he had shoved inside the waist-band of his overalls.

Brick steadied himself and sent two shots at Malvene, while from behind him came the combined reports of two more guns. Malvene seemed to fairly spin off his feet and go down.

Silent and Harp were standing in the doorway, looking at Malvene, as Brick turned. Silent was bleeding from a bullet furrow across his cheek, and Harp was exploring his right arm to find the reason for a blood-soaked sleeve.

Silent glanced up the street and pointed to Felix Bray, who was running toward the bank. It seemed ridiculous for the precise Felix Bray to be running.

"Does he think we're goin' to hurt him?" asked Harp.

Brick stepped into the street.

"C'mon, cowboys," and he headed for the bank, with Harp and Silent following.

Brick was walking with difficulty, half-dragging his left leg. Men and women had come out from places of business, wondering,

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speculating over the pistol battle, and the reasons why these three, limping, bloody men were heading for the bank with guns in their hands. Duggan's horse, with the saddle twisted under its belly, bucked across the street, almost into Brick.

They reached the door of the bank, and as Brick reached for the door-knob, there came the dull thump of a pistol shot fired inside the bank. They stopped. No bullet came their way and no more shots were fired. Soapy Caswell came running across the street and up to them.

"My ——!" panted Soapy. "What's it all mean? I seen Malvene get his, and then——"

Brick opened the door and they went inside. Just inside the railing, near his own desk, lay Felix Bray. Near his body lay a cheap pistol. Felix Bray had killed himself. Brick turned and staggered outside, where he sat down on the steps. He tried to think; but his brain was in a whirl. The three others came out to him.

"She was a humdinger," breathed Silent. "My gosh, that sure was a regular party. Where did they hit you, Brick?"

"Leg and arm," grunted Brick. "No bones; but a —— of a lot of meat."

A crowd of people were drifting up to them, standing at a distance. Suddenly the street seemed filled with riders, riding beside the recovered stage. They drew up at the bank, and Brick got painfully to his feet. Romeo and Buzzard were still roped. Brick went to them and braced himself against the side of the stage, while he spoke directly to Buzzard.

"Malvene, Duggan, Nebraska, Klein and Felix Bray are dead. Now, I want you to tell me which one or which ones killed Grant Dale."

Buzzard stared at Brick. It was unbelievable that all five of those men were dead; but the condition of Brick, Silent and Harp made the statement reasonable.

"Some of yuh killed him," continued Brick. "He was knocked down and likely drowned in the horse-trough. He was shot after he was dead, wasn't he Buzzard?"

Buzzard stared around at the crowd and his eyes came back to Brick. His face twisted with horror; but he knew he must tell.

"Klein killed him," Buzzard's voice was barely above a whisper. "That girl, Rosie —her and Dale was both detectives. She thought Felix Bray was square. He was givin' her a bum steer. She told him who Dale was.

"Klein and Dale were sittin' on that horse-trough that night and Klein hit him with a loaded quirt. Dale fell into the trough. I dunno whether he was drowned or not. Malvene and Klein got him into the stage barn and into the stage. Then they made me drive away with him, and I had to shoot him to make the play good. Sawyer was planted to show up and bring him back."

Brick nodded.

"I thought so. There wasn't no blood on Dale's clothes and I never did find any around where he was killed. Findin' his gun in the horse-trough and then findin' that Klein wanted to find that gun so —— bad."

"Who hit me that night in McGill's place?" asked Silent.

"Sawyer," said Romeo, seemingly anxious to get in on the confession. "They had to get that gun. Nebraska and Duggan was the ones what held me up. They had to do it to make the play right, if anybody comes along."

"But where did Bray come in on it?" asked Soapy.

"Take me to the stage-office and I think I can show yuh."

Willing hands helped him to a seat and the cavalcade moved down the street, where they placed Brick in a chair.

"Somebody get my package off the roof," said Brick.

Slim Hunter picked up Banty Harrison and shoved him up through the trap-door, where Banty retrieved the money package. Brick handed it to Soapy who tore the canvas wrapper off the outside, disclosing a bunch of worthless paper.

"That's what the Whipoorwill would 'a' received," smiled Brick. "Nebraska and Duggan was supposed to pull off a fake job with the stage this mornin'; but they likely seen you fellers and came in to see what was the matter.

"That counterfeit exchange was too slick; but I didn't think it was Bray. I kinda had my eye on Nestor. He lied to me when he said that he didn't know who owned the banks at Marlin City and Redrock."

"He didn't," said Soapy. "Felix Bray

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and me was the only ones what did. I had him get 'em for me."

"Yuh never can tell who is a liar or a thief," stated Slim Hunter. "Yuh just can't, thasall."

"If yuh can't," drawled Soapy, "send for Brick."

Just then Lafe Freeman elbowed his way inside.

"Danged if yuh didn't do it!" he exploded, slapping Brick on the shoulder. "Heard there was a posse on yore trail and I hopped along as soon as possible to pick up their cripples."

He looked at Silent and Harp and back at Brick:

"Yuh said you'd return 'em in good condition and I finds that these are shopworn. I owe yuh two thousand, dang yore hide!"

Brick grinned weakly and looked up at Silent—

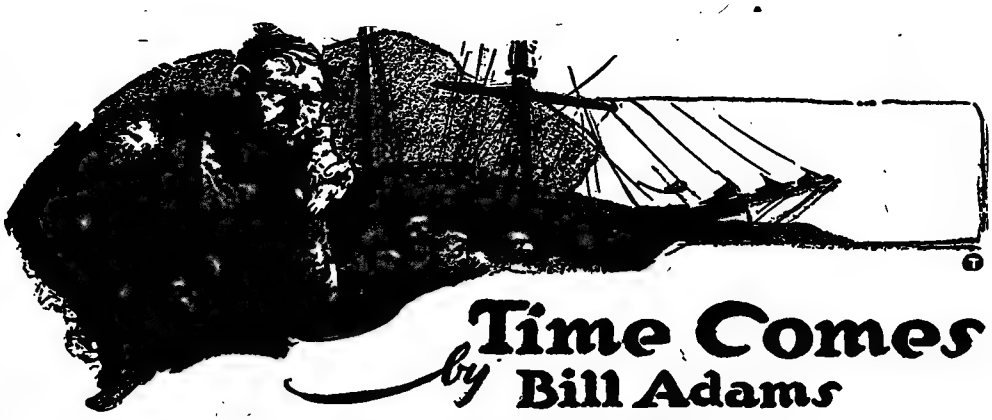
"You go to Marlin City and take care of the jail, Silent."

"My ——!" grunted Silent. "I'll be a hermit yet."

"Take Harp along for company and Buzzard and Romeo for the good of society."

"Change hermit to lunatic," grunted Silent. "C'mon, orkestry."

Brick slumped in his chair and grinned as he fumbled for the makings of a cigaret. The tangled trails had been straightened out.



Time Comes

by Bill Adams

Author of "A Debt at Se ," "Fenceless Meadows," etc.

THE sun of morning, bright on the water of Barnstaple Bay, shone on the decks of a brig, on her tall masts and tapered spars, her flying-boom, and the dark oiled woodwork of her teak wheel-box and charthouse. At her foretruck Blue Peter fluttered, at her main a long crimson pennant bearing her name in white lettering; the crimson and white of flag and lettering flicked and fluttered in the morning breeze. Her hull was black, her boats black, her unpainted masts and yards dark with many oilings; her name, below her counter and upon either bow in dull red lettering scarce distinguishable save close at hand. Her canvas, snugly stowed upon the yards, was brown.

Beneath her boom her figurehead stared over the water—a woman with a disdainful face, black-haired and muffled to the throat in a magenta gown; a pendant, hanging from each ear, heavy with imitation pearls of glass. The glass pearls were the only thing about the brig that shone, even in the light of morning. They alone reflected and flashed back the light.

Her crew thronged the bar of a tavern at the waterside, carousing, swallowing the last drinks before joining the ship; toasting the tavernmaster and his wife, one another, and the names of comrades lost upon the windy sea. They were men with brown faces, square-shouldered, hard-handed; some smooth-shaven, some hairy as old apes—the latter drinking moodily, in silence; the former laughing, shouting the names of girls, swearing at the sea and the luck that sent them seaward.

"Luck to the *Lady Anna*," cried a young

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sailor, raising his glass, looking round the company in the barroom of the tavern "Lowlands Away-oh!"

"—— to your —— *Anna*," replied a yellow-faced man, the bosun of the brig; a short, squat fellow, with a thin white scar upon his left cheek; sandpaper-skinned, mottle-marked—a thin-eyed, claw-fingered fellow with a faded red skull-cap upon his head; a patched shirt of the same color; his pants stuffed into thigh boots; a hand upon the sheath knife at the back of his belt, an elbow resting on the bar.

A laugh rang round the room as he spoke; men holding glasses and mugs half-way to their lips.

"To clear your dirty eyes, old mud-mind," cried the young sailor, flinging his glass of red wine full in the other's face.

A laugh yet louder rang about the barroom of the Lowlands Away-oh; the tavernmaster vaulting the bar, seizing the arms of the mottle-marked man, holding him back; grasping the hand that held the long sheath knife, saying—

"Steady now, lads—let's keep the peace now."

The woman behind the bar, the wife of the tavernmaster, leaning toward the young sailor, spoke to him; smiling as he approached; scowling as he turned his back upon her.

The mottle-marked man, wriggling free of the tavernmaster's grip, stared hard at the other.

"Time comes," he muttered inaudibly; biting his lip; and, going to the bar, leaned upon it.

"Fill up," he said; nodding to the company to get their glasses filled.

The woman behind the bar approached him, whispering, smiling, her eyes down-drooped, her face snaky; her skin strangely white amongst the sea-browned sailors. Leaning over the bar, the mottle-marked man flung an arm about her neck, a short neck set close upon white shoulders, and, drawing her toward him, kissed her upon the mouth.

A laugh still louder rang around the tavern; the tavernmaster scowling at the mottle-marked man, swearing at him for an impudent ——; the woman, her eyes flashing, not all in anger, unconsciously licking her lips—as though a snake had swallowed a fat rat—her hair, disheveled, hanging about her shoulders.

"Drink hearty, mates," said the mottle-marked man, looking from shaggy brows toward the young sailor.

They raised their glasses, tossing the wine down; swallowing long gulps of the brown Jamaica; wiping their mustaches, they strolled to the tavern door, hitching their pants, crying back:

"Come on, boys—let's go aboard now," and—

"Good-by, Mistress Mallory—good luck to you,"

or—

"We'll fetch a string o' pearls when we come back again, Mistress Mallory."

Mistress Mallory, calling the young sailor, beckoned him to her; speaking low, as if trying to make some bargain; the sailor ignoring her, and going toward the tavern door. They sauntered off, talking noisily, lighting pipes; cutting slices from plugs of black tobacco which they rolled between their palms. The mottle-marked man, at the bar, draining his mug to the dregs, turning, beckoned to the tavern-master's wife; and, reaching over the bar as she approached him, seizing her arm, dragged her toward him, kissing her mouth again. She drew away, pretending anger at his impudence, without a flush on her cheek. The tavernmaster, coming up as the man, letting her go, made off after the others, spoke angrily to her; snapping as a savage dog.

"Oh, you poor fool," she answered, staring into his face, "can't you let well be well? —d'ye think I can't fish pearls from the sea?"

THE sailors gathered at the brig's boat.

"They says she's bound for Pearl Island—comin' home again wi' a cargo o' pearls," said one.

"Aye—that's what they say. A full cargo o' pearls," said another.

From the tavern behind them a song was wafted to the waterside; a couple of loiterers singing, and the voice of Mistress Mallory joining them—

> Lowlands, Lowlands,
> Lowlands away-oh,
> Heave, oh, heave, oh—hauling away-oh,
> Lowlands away-oh.

The tavernmaster and the bottle-boy stood in the door to watch them pull off;

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the woman looking from an upper window, her neck open, its whiteness distinct in the morning light; her kerchief waving to the departing men.

"We'll fetch you them pearls, mistress," cried a sailor, thrusting his oar through the ro'lock.

The mottle-marked man, climbing the Jacob's ladder, dropped nimbly upon the brig's deck.

"Bosun," said the mate, addressing him, "get the hands forrard; get the anchor in—lively does it, now."

They hoisted the boat to her place upon the skids, lashing her down; and went forward to man the windlass.

"Walk her down, now—lively does it," ordered the bosun, staring at the Lowlands Away-oh; biting the ends of his mustache.

The sailors stamped around the windlass, the pawls clanking, the cable rattling through the hawse-pipe; one of them singing an outbound chantey:

"Oh, it's blow, an' it's blow,
Blow, bullies, blow,
Oh, it's blow, an' it's blow,
Blow, bullies, blow.
There's rum, an' there's sugar, an' pearls down below,
Blow, blow, blow, bullies, blow."

The brig took the wind abeam, careening a little; men swarming along her topsail yards to loosen sail.

"Haul that there pennant down, an' that Peter off the fore," cried the mate; and down came the flags all a-flutter. The ship stood away to round the point, a long white bone at her forefoot; her stern lifting a little—her railings rolling slowly to the easy swell.

From the upper window of the Lowlands Away-oh a white kerchief waved; Mistress Mallory bidding ship and sailors good-by. The tavernmaster behind the bar counted his gains; the bottle-boy, washing the glasses and mugs, stopping to tweak the tail of the yellow tomcat curled in the window, looking through the twinkly panes to where the brig creamed the sea beneath her fast feet—the morning sun upon her brown topsails, the wind bellying her topgallants.

"I wonder if they'll bring me those pearls," thought Mistress Mallory, staring into her eyes in the long mirror; picturing pearl earrings in her ears; a pearl necklace about her white neck.

"A few more bits o' gold an' I'll sell the Lowlands Away-oh an' quit business—Judy—hey, Judy," called the tavernmaster; and going to the foot of the stairway he shouted up it—

"How'd you like to be a *fine* lady, Judy, wife, hey?"

"I'm a-goin' to them there pearl islands too, when I'm growed a bit more," said the bottle-boy to himself, swallowing the last drop of Jamaica from a pewter mug to make him grow.

The yellow tomcat twitched his tail, thrusting out his claws—as if dreaming of revenge upon the bottle-boy and other foes.

THE skipper of the brig *Lady Anna* sat with his mate at the cabin table:

"Forty bales of crimson cloth below. Forty wooden buckets of glass beads; and rubbish enough to buy the half of Africa," said he.

The mate nodded his head.

"Zanzibar for ivory—black and white both; and after that about the Cape to Jamaica for a 'tween-decks full of rum; maybe a hundred sacks of sugar into the bargain. Black ivory's good trading, mister," said the skipper.

"So I've heard tell, sir. That's what I've heard," said the mate.

"Get her best canvas aloft, mister. I ain't going to lay-to for no man-o'-war's man. The *Lady Anna*'s a fly-foot packet," said the skipper.

"I've got her storm suit aloft, sir," said the mate.

"Keep it so," said the skipper, "and crack her along under all she'll carry day and night. I'm going to Zanzibar for ivory."

The mate nodded his head.

The skipper rose to leave the cabin, and, turning about in the doorway, said—

"There'll be pearls enough to give the *Lady Anna* under the bow a change for fancier earrings, mister."

Forward, the hands sat in the fo'csle; four of them with the cards, the others looking over their shoulders. The mottle-marked man, the brig's bosun, put his head through a port.

"You," he said, addressing the young sailor who had thrown the wine in his face that morning, "skip aloft an' loose that fore royal—lively does it, now;" and to the others: "Stand by to hoist away. Time for play later."

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"Time comes," he muttered to himself.

The sailors, leaving the fo'csle, gathered at the halyards ready to hoist the sail; and, hearing a voice from aloft call, "All clear," ran the royal to the mast-head, the sail a shadow dim against the stars.

"Get to that yard," bellowed the bosun to the man aloft. "Overhaul them buntlines."

The sailors returned to the fo'csle; the bosun, standing alone upon the deck, staring at the shadow of the royal against the stars, watching the young sailor climbing to the hoisted yard, and laying out to overhaul the buntlines. When the sailor was on the lee yard the mottle-marked bosun, going to the weather royal brace, lifted it from its pin, and, staring aloft, let the brace go slack with a quick jerk. From aloft there was a faint cry; a shape falling from the royal yard, hurtling toward the racing water alongside the brig.

A hand to his ear, the mottle-marked man, listening to the sounds of the night, replaced the royal brace upon its pin. The silence was unbroken save for the lap of the hidden sea and the murmur of the wind in the shrouds.

"That's that," muttered the mottle-marked man to himself, as, going slowly aft, he waited till the mate and skipper should come up from their suppers that he might go below for his.

"Time comes," he muttered, pulling his long mustache.

Eight bells was struck by and by; the hands mustering below the bridge to answer to their names.

"Murray."

"Here, sir."

"Watkin."

" 'Ere."

"Rinker."

"Here, sir."

"Blake—where's Blake?"

No reply.

"One o' you go fetch that lubber aft. What does he think this is, hey?" shouted the mate, calling the tally of the sailors.

"He's had too much o' that —— rum," said the mate to himself.

"WHAT do you suppose is come o' that young fellow Blake, mister?" asked the mottle-marked man of the mate, upon the bridge, when the watches were set.

"Too much rum—gone overboard to Davy," said the mate.

"That's what I says too, sir—too much rum, an' gone overboard to Davy." said the mottle-marked bosun of the brig *Lady Anna*.

OFF the Zanzibar coast lay the brig *Lady Anna*; twenty pair of elephant ivories in her lower hold resting upon sacks of spice and coffee and balls of raw rubber. On her deck the Portugee and Arab traders mingled, watching the slings bring up bales of cloth and headed wooden buckets full of glass beads.

"Rubbish enough to buy the half of Africa," said the skipper of the *Lady Anna*, hitting Jake Camacho, the Portugee, a crack between his fat shoulders.

Jake grinned.

"Ven zee vind 'ee coom oop, zen I breeng you zee ivory," said he.

"You bring 'em quick, my lad, see? I ain't wantin' to cut an' run for no man-o'-war's man," said the skipper of the brig.

"I breeng you t'irty ivories—ah, ze nice leedle ivory, meester captain," said Jake Camacho.

As dusk fell, the Arab and the Portugee traders went over the side; the sailors clearing up the brig's decks at the end of the day's trading.

Over the shore-line to the westward the sky was a dying flame, blood-colored, and smoky with the village fires; flecked with changing lights of turquoise and gold, breathless; smoldering above the musky jungles. Seaward the horizon glimmered, as if a lamp, just lighted, hung behind thick curtains; a glow of cold silver widening above the sea's edge.

Upon the railing of the brig sat the mottle-marked man, keeping the tally; his faded red cap upon his head, the sleeves of his red shirt rolled to his huge elbows, baring ape-like arms; his legs dangling in big boots; his thin eyes peering at the terror-dumb blacks who, chained together, came over the railing; men with dark stains upon their backs and shoulders; women carrying babies; girls hiding their faces.

"One, two, three, four, five," counted the mottle-marked man; a mark on the page of the tally-book at the count of five.

"One, two, three, four, five," and another mark on the page of the tally-book.

"One, two, three, four, five," and one

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more mark on the page of the tally-book.

"Keep the tally o' the bucks apart, you mug-faced lubber, you," said the mate to the tally-man, peering at the tally-page.

"Aye, aye, mister—that's what I'm a-doin'," said the mottle-marked man.

"Time comes," he muttered to himself as the skipper, leaning over the bridge-rail, beckoned to his mate.

"Is them new topgallants aloft, mister? Is them topgallant masts well greased? Is them backstays overhauled? We're maybe goin' to have to cut an' run for it," said the skipper of the *Lady Anna.*

"One, two, three, four, five," counted the tally-man upon the railing.

The skipper called the mate to the bridge.

"There's a Manaar pearler coming in for coast trading. I heard them Arabs a-talkin' to Jake. We'll keep lookout for her, mister. I'll trade ahead of that fat Jake. I'll steal his pearls. Keep that hand in the fore cross-trees an' see he keeps a bright lookout. I'll trade for them pearls from Manaar. Joe Rufio's always ready for a pretty nigger gal."

"Aye, aye, sir. I'll tell it to the bosun," said the mate. "D'you reckon that there'll be a man-o'-war outside, sir? D'you reckon that maybe we'll have to make a run for it?"

"Get them topgallant masts well greased, an' get all clear for running—in case that should be so, sir," said the skipper.

"One, two, three—an' that's the lot," counted the tally-man upon the railing; making a last mark upon the tally-book. "'Ere you are, mister mate; 'ere's the tally all-sir-garney-oh—eight and twenty ivories not countin' the kids. *They'll* kick off when she picks up the swell an' starts a-rollin'. I ain't counted *them.*"

"Mister mate," called the skipper from the bridge, "have the hands heave in, sir. There's a bit of a breeze blowin' up, an' I'm a-goin' to run off shore—keepin' a lookout for the pearler. Lively does it, now."

The *Lady Anna,* a freshening breeze off-shore, took the bit between her teeth and ran for the sea; her wide topgallants bellied, her courses high-lifted; the sea in her wake creaming with emerald and sapphire; petrels circling over the water astern; the western sky as old blood, dull crimson turning to black; the eastern sky as lantern-lit opals; deep shadows above the sea's edge, where clouds hung.

"Umph," said the skipper on the bridge. "Where's that there Manaar pearler got to now, eh?"

"There's a light astern, sir—a glimmer like from a ship's binnacle, no more, sir. A twinkle lost, an' showin' now an' again, sir," said the mate.

The skipper of the slaver peered astern, over the dark sea, where petrels flew unseen, and where emeralds and sapphires were lost in the deeps of night.

"Loose all sail. Drive her to it," said the skipper. "Yon's a man-o'-war's man with his lights blinked."

They gave her sail; sweating the topgallants tight, and the royals above them; setting spanker and gaff topsail, monkey gaff, bull-whanger, and all fore-and-afters. She ran—as a woman, racing homeward from a tryst, treading down the primroses. Impatient of the sea hollows, she lifted above them as one who leaps to gaze beyond a hedge-row upon a hill's crest; the sea singing strange music about her; its gems lost in the deeps of night.

In the hold of the slaver crouched blacks from a ravaged village; their eyes deep with dread of a god not understood; their souls sick; women holding babies to their breasts and soothing them with soft words; mumbling of a heathen god who would bring them safe to some road's ending.

"Umph," said the skipper on his bridge. "I reckon that that there man-o'-war's man is a-goin' to fall astern."

From forward came the voice of a sailor, who, as he stuffed his pipe, sang:

> Blow, bullies, blow;
> Blow, bullies, blow.
> Sugar an' rum an' pearls down below.

Astern a flash of flame showed for an instant; followed by the dull rumble of a cannon-shot.

"Umph," said the skipper on his bridge, "I reckon that that there man-o'-war's man is a-gettin' desp'rit. He's takin' a chance shot at the whole o' the night."

"That's the last we'll see o' him. He's takin' a chance shot just for the luck of it," said he to his mate.

There was the sudden sound of splintered wood, a crash upon the main deck of the low, reeling slaver; her lee rail down in the sea—the man-o'-war's man's ball ripping a great hole just to lee of the hatch coaming.

In the hold the blacks trembled, numb

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with terror, spattered with bright blotches of blood; blood dripping from the beams, dribbling from the stringers.

The skipper and the mate stood upon the poop, staring astern.

"Good for us he didn't fire many o' them sort o' shots," said the skipper.

The night was blowing up, the sea roaring, the sky cloud-hidden; silver spangles on the water, beneath a break where the moon shone through.

"Square away a point, mister; an' take them royals off," said the skipper.

The voices of men mingled with the uproar of the sea and the groan of blacks.

"Mister," said the mottle-marked man, pointing to the weather bow, "yonder's a light a-shinin'."

"Captain," said the mate, going to the bridge, "look over yonder, sir."

"The Manaar pearler! Mainsail up and topgallants down. Square that yard. I'm going to trade with Joe Rufio. I'm going to beat fat Jake for his pearls," said the skipper of the brig *Lady Anna*.

Far down the night there was a twinkling light, now lost in the hollows, now high-lifted on the ridges.

They backed the main yard of the brig; lowering her topgallants away, and hauling her mainsail up; the vessel lifting lazily, awaiting the coming of the swiftly approaching pearler.

"Get a man forrard to signal her with a lantern. We daren't show a flare. That man-o'-war's man might see," said the skipper.

Upon the end of the flying boom, a lantern swinging to and fro and up and down in his hand, sat the mottle-marked man; his legs dangling above the sea; the lantern-light upon his face, his red skull-cap, his wide-open throat and stained mustaches.

From the pearler came an answering light; a pale-green flame illuminating the sea around her.

"Curse! She's showing a flare! That man-o'-war's man's gone, I reckon. We'll make the trade quick an' run for it," said the skipper of the brig.

"Bosun," called the mate from the fo'csle head to the signaler upon the boom end, "get them hatches off. Skipper's going trading with Rufio. Fetch up some ivory. Lively does it, now. You know Rufio's liking."

Down the hatchway went the bosun, the lantern, in his hand, upheld above him.

"A lot o' dead perished niggers," said he, and cried to the deck above:

"Below here, a couple o' you swabs. Pass them corpuses up. Lively does it. Throw 'em over the side."

The dead and dying were passed to the darkness of the night above; dim shapes dragged across the deck and flung to the lifting waters—gain for the sharp-finned sharks awaiting what the night might bring them.

Wind-drifted over the sea came the groan of a tackle-block, the rattle of sheets, mingled with the sound of voices, as the pearler lay to on the brig's weather bow.

"Ahoy, ahoy," cried a voice across the water.

"Ahoy, yourself—this is Joe Rufio. What have ye got?"

Forward, aboard the *Lady Anna*, a sailor was singing:

> "Blow, bullies, blow;
> Blow, bullies, blow.
> Sugar an' rum an' pearls down below."

"What have ye for trade?" cried the voice of Joe Rufio.

"What'll ye have?" came the answer over the sea between.

"White gals for choice—failin' that black'll do," shouted a voice from the pearler's bow.

"Down, —— you, you lubber," shouted the pearler's captain.

He boarded the *Lady Anna*, going to the cabin for a long swallow of Jamaica; a canvas sack in his hand, its lanyard fast to his belt.

"What of the banks?" asked the skipper of the brig.

Rufio opened the little sack, freeing the lanyard; tipping the sack over the table; spilling pearls, both black and white; his fingers gathering them into a little heap before him.

"That from the banks," said he. "What for trade?"

"Mister mate, go get them ivories along; them fancy ones; them pretty ones; lively does it now, mister," said the skipper of the brig.

The mate met the mottle-marked man at the hatch coaming.

"Them's the ones," said he; "them's Rufio's sort. Fetch 'em along."

"Ah; that's *that*, dearie," said Rufio,

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rising as the bosun entered the cabin and tilting the chin of the foremost of three young girls that he might look into her face.

From the poop above them a voice called down the open skylight—

"Sail comin' up, sir."

"Trade even for the sack," cried the skipper of the *Lady Anna*.

"Even it is," said Rufio, tossing the little sack upon the table; siezing the rope from the bosun's hand and hastening to the quarter-deck; dragging the slave girls with him.

The schooner lay, drifted to a biscuit-toss, on the brig's lee bow. Rufio, shouting to his crew to stand by, called to one of the rowers, and together they lowered the girls to the waiting boat; leaping after them, Rufio grasped the yoke-ropes, shouting—

"Give way—lay back."

In a moment the topsails of the pearling-schooner rose above the sea; flitting as the wings of a frightened night bird along the wind—the moon, peeping through a cloud-rift, bright upon the white canvas; a high-thrown billow tossed to snow about her bow.

"Yards up—all sail. Lively now," shouted the skipper of the slaver, hurrying to his bridge, Rufio's sack in his hand, as the schooner captain left his cabin.

They gave her sail; sheeting home the main course, racing the topgallants and royals to the mast-heads; running the fore-and-afters up; the *Lady Anna* careening far over, gathering way; seas boarding her waist; sprays flashing above her fo'csle head; opals and emeralds of the sea whirling in the moon-glimmer below her counter.

"Tell the bosun to clear them 'tween-decks—lively does it!" shouted the skipper when the brig, with all sail crowded, was snorting through the sea.

"I'll take no chances—even if I *can* run away from him. I'll take no chances o' bein' caught wi' black ivories in my hold. Over they goes—an' mister man-o'-war's man can stop to pick 'em up if 'e will! 'E'll never catch the *Anna—she* ain't built that way," he muttered to himself.

Down the hatch leaped the mottle-marked man; a lantern in one hand, the other on the long sheath-knife at the back of his belt.

Cries arose from the 'tween-decks hold of the swift brig, mingling with the uproar of the weather; cloud-banks, scudding over the moon's face, darkening the sea, casting black shadows along the *Lady Anna's* decks. Sailors, reaching downward from the hatch coaming, siezed on struggling figures, jerking them upward.

"The ol' man must be thinkin' as that there frigate the coasters calls the *Catch-Dolphin* is somew'ere 'ereabout. 'E showed t'other 'is 'eels quick enough—I reckons 'e ain't a-takin' no chances on dark nights," said a sailor.

Below, in the flicker of the lantern-light, a thin-eyed man in a red skull-cap, his sleeves rolled to the elbow, his legs in great thigh boots, moved relentlessly to and fro, a shining blade in one hand; grunting now and again as he went about his work.

Figures disappeared over the deep-dipped lee railing of the flying slaver; smothered cries, arising from the sea, quickly lost; the cloud-banks heavy over the moon's face; the brig's decks in gloom, dashed by ceaseless sprays; her sides trembling to the pounding of the windward seas. All sail set, straining to the rising wind, she made away along the furrows with no sound of gear or outcry of sheet or halyard; silence, save for the whine of the wind and the roll of the sea, falling upon her decks as the hatches were put on and battened down.

WHEN morning came the skipper of the *Lady Anna* counted his pearls; emptying Rufio's sack upon the table.

"An' now," said he, "we'll lay for Port Royal an' stock that 'tween-decks with rum an' sugar for Bristol port."

ON A misty April day the *Lady Anna* stole into the Bristol Channel; Lundy Island on her port beam, the Barnstaple shore scarce visible to starboard; the sun glowing warmly now and again on her brown topsails; but death on her decks.

Sailors, gathered at the rail, stared shoreward; men with loose teeth, and eyes as the eyes of death; their feet shambling, no tunes to their voices.

"Bosun," said the mate, "get the anchor clear. Wind's falling."

The bosun took the scurvy-ridden sailors to the fo'csle head to clear away the anchor, lest the wind, falling, leave them at the tide's mercy.

"I'll take the wheel bos'," said the mate. "That'll give you one more man."

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The brig crept past Lundy; thick fog, driving in from the sea, shrouding her decks, hiding the shore-line; and her mast-heads from deck.

In her cabin, his head nodding above the teak table, sat the skipper, counting pearls from Manaar; lifting them from a little canvas sack; filtering them through his fingers.

"One, two, three, four, five."

The cabin door was softly opened, a face peering in; the face of a man who wore a dull-red skull-cap, his sleeves rolled to the elbows; his legs tucked into big thigh boots —a grin, hungry, wrinkling thin lips below a grizzled mustache.

A cry, stifled, a hand upon the lips of the cryer, arose; the skipper falling forward, his face amongst the pearls of Manaar; pearls in his closing eyes.

In the cabin of the *Lady Anna* a mottle-marked man counted pearls; while above him, on the poop, the mate stood in the wet fog; peering at the compass card; the sailors on the fo'csle head staring, scurvy-ridden, toward the lost shore. Rising from the table, he peered into the cabins encircling the saloon; grinning down upon the steward; holding up a string of pearls before the eyes of a dying man; the thin light from an open port falling upon them, as upon the old distempered fellow who perished now upon the door-sill of home.

"One, two, three," he counted, fingering the pearls; the steward taking no notice of him or of them; dying without a gasp at the count of three, a rattle in his throat.

Closing the door, the mottle-marked man stepped to the quarter-deck; walking forward to the fo'csle head, where, the fish-tackle in their hands, the sailors sang in raspy voices:

"Blow, bullies, blow;
Blow, bullies, blow.
Sugar an' rum an' pearls down below."

"What's come o' the skipper, now, do you suppose? I ain't seed him of late," said the mottle-marked man.

"Belay that fish-fall," said he; "stand by;" and, going from the fo'csle head, he walked aft, ascending the accommodation ladder to the poop.

There was no wind, the brig lying becalmed, drifting with the tide; the sails limp on her yards. Going to the wheel, he spoke to the mate.

"What do you suppose, now, has come of the skipper? I ain't seed him of late," said he.

The mate looked along the deck, aloft at the hidden spars, into the chart-house port before him.

"What's come of him, now, do you suppose?" asked the bosun of the brig *Lady Anna*.

"It's got him, maybe," said the mate.

The bosun leaned over the taffrail, staring down at the brown waters of the channel; and, turning, the mate spoke to him.

"Come an' let's go look for the skipper," he said, letting go of the wheel-spokes.

They went together to the chart-house, and, coming out, descended to the quarter-deck; entering the cabin, the bosun first.

"Quiet, an' it's pearls. Noise, an' it's this," said the bosun; a knife in one hand at the throat of the mate; pearls in the other extended toward him.

The eyes of the mate were fixed upon the pearls, and, motioning the knife away, he took them from the bosun's extended palm.

"One, two, three, four, five," he counted.

Together they lifted the skipper; gathering up the pearls upon which his face had rested; carrying him, unseen, to the quarter railing, and dropping him gently to the sea; the shore hidden in the fog.

The wind was gone, the calm absolute now, the tide carrying the *Lady Anna* upon it, lifeless as a leaf upon a stream; her canvas and rigging adrip with the mists; her sailors, from the fo'csle head, staring shoreward, eager for a taste of green things to heal their scurvy-ridden bodies.

Night fell; fog on the sea; the ship motionless; no sound reaching her, no lap of wave or groan of tackle-block to break the silence.

At the cabin table sat the mate and the bosun, talking in low tones; their heads nodding, their eyes as the eyes of snakes.

"She'll pile ashore afore mornin' like as not. No wind, an' tide-rips running," said the mate.

"We'd better take the gig an' leave her. Who'll know it?" said the bosun.

They arose, going silent-footed to the deck; unlacing the gig's cover; freeing the falls; lifting her from the chocks, and swinging her outboard. Taking the hand lead, they sounded for bottom as they pulled from the brig.

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"No wind. Tide'll carry us in," said the mate.

They sat, hidden from each other, in the dense fog of evening; the sound of the sea upon the coast to the southward just audible; the mottle-marked man in the stern sheets, a hand on the gunwale, a hand on the long sheath knife at the back of his belt. Hunched on a thwart amidhsips, his back to the other, sat the mate, peering down into his upturned palm; fingering pearls with the forefinger of his other hand, counting aloud, very softly, to himself:

"One, two, three, four, five;
One, two, three, four——"

And a loud grunt at the count of four; the counter falling forward to the bottom of the boat, gurgling—as when a cow bogs deeper and deeper in the soft peat.

There was silence, broken presently by the sound of a soft splash; the brown water bubbling. Then, in the fog a voice that muttered—

"One, two, three, four, five."

The mottle-marked man was gathering pearls from the bottom of the boat.

Hearing the lap of the sea, the wash of waves near to him, the bosun of the *Lady Anna* took the oars, and, thrusting them through the ro'locks, pulled toward the sound of lapping water; and, running presently aground, leaped ashore.

Tightening his belt, he stooped to wipe his sheath knife six times up and down in the wet sand, replacing it within its sheath.

A draft of air fanned his face—the first breath of an approaching wind; a moan, as of coming storm, sounding far off through the sea fog.

AT DAWN of a windy morning, mists driving swiftly up-channel, wreckers were busy along the sands of Barnstaple Bay; three men gathering booty from the remnants of a vessel that had pounded to pieces during the night; timbers scattered along the foreshore, planks, caught here and there amongst the jagged rock fringes, swinging to and fro as the sea struck them. The tide was out, the shore fringed with seaweed and fragments of the wreck; here and there a barrel showing its bilge from the weeds and the sand.

On the teeth of a sharp rock, caught in a crevice between high and low water, hung the figurehead of the wreck—a woman with a disdainful face; dark-haired, and muffled to the throat in a magenta gown; the gown stained with the wear and the wash of the sea. Pendants hung from her ears; great glass beads that had somehow escaped the smashing of the shoreward-running surges.

A man, seeking amongst the strewn wreckage, gave orders to the three; bidding them break out the sand-buried barrels and load them upon a two-wheeled cart. His hands were deep in his breeches pockets, his lips pursed, whistling a tune:

> Blow, bullies, blow;
> Blow, bullies, blow.
> Sugar and rum and pearls down below.

"When I sell out this little lot—ah!" said he to himself; watching his men dig free a barrel of Jamaica from the wet sands.

The men loaded the cart; stowing the barrels of rum upon it until it could hold no more; turning on the wheel-spokes while the horse strained to start; pushing behind till the cart was on a rough, deep-rutted roadway; the sound of horse-hoofs and the rumble of wheels drowned in the roar of the weather. Behind the cart walked the tavernmaster, his hands deep in his pockets, his lips pursed, whistling the tune of the sugar and rum and pearls.

"When you've got this little lot unloaded," said he, "you go fetch that figurehead from off yonder rocks. I'm going to set her up at my door. Maybe I'll be giving her a new pair of earrings."

BEFORE the sky had paled for dawn a man, standing close under the windows of the tavern Lowlands Away-oh, listened intently; his head bowed low, a hand upon the back of his belt. As he stood there, hidden in the fog and the dusk, the door of the tavern was opened and men went forth into the weather, closing the door behind them.

When they were well away he bent down, and, gathering a handful of pebbles, tossed some of them lightly against an upper window. The window opened, slowly, a little way, and a woman's voice called down softly from behind thick red curtains—

"Who is it?"

"*H-s-s-s-s-s-t*," said the man below.

"Who is it?" whispered the voice from behind the red curtains.

"*H-s-s-s-s-s-t*—pearls come in from sea," said the man.

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"S-s-s-s-t—I'll come down and let you in," said the voice from above.

The door opening a little, a feeble ray of light shone out into the mists upon a man who wore a red skull-cap, his throat wide to the weather, his legs in thigh boots; one hand behind his back, the other holding fast a little canvas sack.

The woman looked hard at him.

"*S-s-s-s-t,*" she said, and motioned him to enter.

After closing the door behind him and seeing that the window shutters were fast closed, she turned the lamp low; then, looking fixedly at him from shining eyes, her neck very white above her long gown, her hair bound in a twist upon her head, bade him be seated.

The mottle-marked man approached as if to embrace her; the woman drawing away.

"Not now," she whispered. "Time comes."

"Aye—that's it. Time comes," he said, looking at her bright eyes.

"See here," he continued, "lookee," and tilted the little sack upon the table; the woman's eyes glowing, her finger to her lip, enjoining silence.

"Time's come," said the mottle-marked man. "You mind what you says to me, mistress?—'Pearls a-plenty an' I'm your woman.' You mind them words, eh?"

"Yes, of course I mind them," she said.

She stepped behind the bar; the man following her and pulling out the long till; gold and silver staring in his face; so that he bit his lip with desire for her and her plenty.

"Time's come," he said, making as if to embrace her; the woman drawing away with a swift motion; brushing, close behind him, to the other side of the bar again, smiling at him with shining eyes; slipping something bright within her long gown as she passed his back.

"Fill that," she said; tossing a sack larger than his own upon the bar before him.

Filling the sack, he slung it over his shoulder; the little sack in his other hand; and, crossing the room, opening the door a little way, peered out.

"Our weather," said he.

"Yes, our weather—my weather," she answered; looking sidewise at him from bright eyes; then, stepping swiftly into the fog, bade him follow.

"Let's walk. Let's hurry," she said; listening intently into the weather.

"Aye, let's get out o' here," he muttered, gazing hungrily at her; trying to grasp her fingers.

"Not yet—time comes," she whispered to him, laughing quietly.

"Aye—time comes—that's right," he repeated; never taking his eyes from her; from the mist in her hair, and the strange brightness in her eyes.

For a while they walked rapidly, the woman ahead, the man close behind. Suddenly she stopped, a hand to her ear. The man's face was expressionless, watching her as a dumb brute its master.

"*S-s-s-s-t,*" she said.

She took his hand; the man jerking at her touch, his eyes on her face.

"Wait a while," she said; and, smiling, added, "Time comes."

"Aye, that's it—time comes," murmured the mottle-marked man.

"Wait here a little. I'll be right back. Keep this for us, safe," she whispered, fingering for a moment the little sack in his hand.

The man crouched where she left him, upon the spongy turf, at the foot of a stunted foreshore tree; his face expressionless; satisfied with fortune's way; his fingers unconsciously fumbling within the little sack; his lips moving imperceptibly—

"One, two, three, four, five;
One, two, three, four, five."

For an instant he thought he heard the sound of horse-hoofs and the rumble of a cart; then, realizing that it was the jingle of gold and silver in the sack upon his shoulder, grinned.

SEEING the form of a woman in the mist before him, the tavern-master stopped in his tracks.

"A GHOST from some wreck," said he to himself, "some skipper's wife's ghost gone walking."

For an instant he trembled at his superstitions; then, hearing his name spoken, cried:

"You, Judy?—You fool, what are you at?"

Holding him from following the cart, drawing him aside to the spongy turf by the rough roadway, she whispered into his ear; the man bending to her, listening with wide

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yes; biting his lip. Drawing something om beneath her long gown, she handed it) him.

"I took it from his belt," she whispered, when he wanted to kiss me. He never new."

The tavernmaster took the knife; staring t the long blade and feeling with his thumb he needle-sharp point. Unconsciously he ummed the tune of the sugar and rum and earls.

"Hush, you must be quiet. Come," said he woman; and, holding his hand, she led im through the thick weather as if com-letely at home in it. The wet turf gave no ound; the roar of the sea and of the dying ale thundering about them; the fog as a ast blanket beaten in the wind.

Suddenly, placing a hand upon the tav-ernmaster's lips, the woman stopped; her other hand tightening its grip upon his wrist; her face close against his; her lips to his ear. Moving her fingers from his lips, she pointed directly before them. The man, peering into the dense fog, saw only the dim shape of a stunted foreshore tree. Still she pointed; and, still peering, he saw, directly below him, the figure of a crouching man who wore a skull-cap, and upon his legs great thigh boots; a sack over his shoulder, and in his other hand also a small sack.

The roar of the sea upon the sand was continuous, and, to one unused to it, deafening; the whine of the wind blowing in from sea unceasing; the fog a gray wall. For a moment they stood so, above the crouching figure that peered seaward below them. The woman's fingers were no longer upon the tavernmaster's wrist; her lips no longer at his ear. Her hands clasped, the fingers interlocked, she stepped softly backward; her eyes as stars in frosty weather, her damp cheeks flushed by the sea-wind.

Suddenly, the tavernmaster bending swiftly downward, there was a deep grunt—as when a cow, in the soft peat, bogs deeper and deeper.

IN THE barroom of the tavern Lowlands Away-oh the lights were bright; for the day without, heavy with fog, was gray and murky. Through the open door men rolled barrels of Jamaica, lowering them through a large trap door that, opening upon stone steps, led to a great damp cellar. They ceased now and again from their labors to watch the tavern-master, who, behind the bar, was making little stacks of gold and silver coins; and as he marked the page of his tally-book hummed a tune:

> Blow, bullies, blow;
> Blow, bullies, blow.
> Sugar and rum and pearls down below.

Looking up, he called to the men:

"Come get a drink on the house, lads, when you've finished that little lot. Then go you and fetch that figurehead off yonder rocks afore the tide flows. I'm going to set her up by my door. Maybe I'll buy her a new set of earrings."

The bottle-boy, passing the drinks around, mumbled to himself, "When I grows a bit bigger I'm a-goin' to them pearl islands;" and he stole a sip of Jamaica from the lip of a pewter mug; to make him grow.

In the wide window a sleeping yellow tomcat twitched his tail; and, thrusting his claws out, dreamed of sweet revenges.

Up-stairs, before a long mirror, stood the wife of the tavernmaster; her eyes bright, her cheeks flushed, her long hair coiled in a twist upon her head. About her white neck there lay a string of pearls, and, both hands at her neck, she fingered them lovingly, counting—

"One, two, three, four, five;
One, two, three, four, five."

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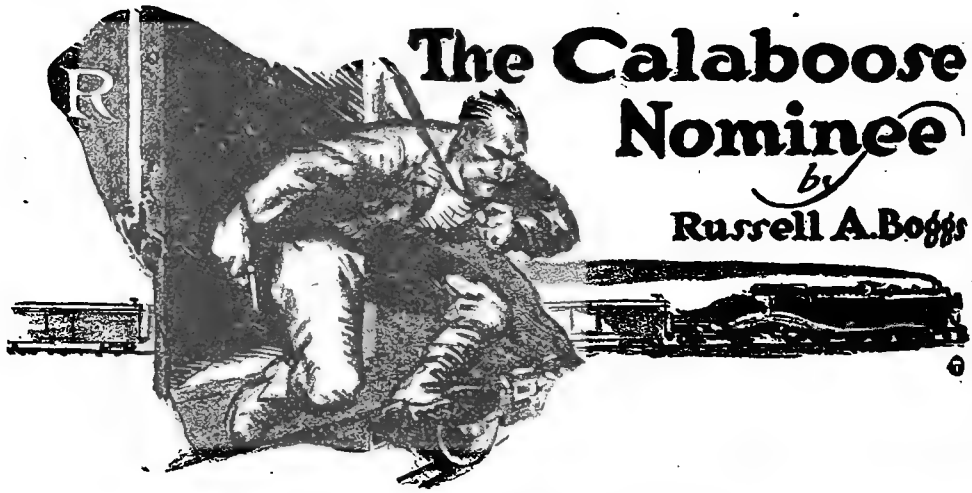

The Calaboose Nominee

by

Russell A. Boggs

Author of "Safe for Sam," "The Accounting," etc.

"I AM," said the important-looking individual peering in at the ticket window, "Mr. Olyphant, from the office of the auditor of revenue."

"Oh," said Dan McFall.

"I've come to check over your accounts," pursued the auditor's man.

"Oh," said Dan again.

The auditor's man cleared his throat authoritatively.

"I would like," he said, "to have the office door opened."

The agent at Hosmer reached in his pocket, brought forth a flat key and tossed it to the small ticket counter, just underneath the visitor's nose.

"Try that," said Dan and resumed his figuring.

The auditor's man glared a moment at the inexpressive back of the busy McFall. Then, snapping up the key, he thrust it in the lock, swung the door open and stalked in. His little hand-bag he dropped ungraciously on the floor.

"Your cash book and daily balance sheets," he commanded.

At his desk Dan McFall drew a line below a column of figures and totaled them. That done, he spoke.

"Just a moment," he observed; and rising from his chair he stepped to the cash drawer underneath the ticket ledge. Unlocking the drawer he emptied it completely, placing the bills and coins in little piles on his desk. The money counted, he compared the result with the total of his column of figures.

"Seems to gibe," he said.

From a shelf of his stationery case he secured a large envelope made of heavy paper. In this he placed all the cash, stitched it through with a needle and cord, and with a piece of red wax held over a lighted match sealed it, using the brass office seal to impress the wax.

Mr. Olyphant, of the auditor's office, had been watching McFall with annoyed, cold eyes. Dan, however, appeared utterly oblivious of this. The sealing accomplished, he for the first time gave his undiverted attention to Olyphant.

"I suppose," said Dan abruptly, "you're the fellow who's been trying to raise all this —— for me—about the delay in receiving some of my reports."

Olyphant seemed somewhat disconcerted.

"Er—ah—" he stated. "There has—there has been some delay. That is very true."

He cleared his throat again.

"Yes; very true," affirmed Dan unswervingly. "The reason is this: Up until three months ago I knew absolutely nothing about agency work; my railroad activities had been confined to straight telegraphy. Then, because they needed an agent here badly, and quickly, they stuck me in this place—quite against my wishes. All I now know about station accounts I've dug out for myself in the last ninety days. That's

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recisely why there were delays. There were forms and reports of which I'd never heard until I was asked for them."

"Er—ah—" began the auditor's man.

"Now, you listen," ordered Dan McFall. "I'm telling you something. I've had enough. For the first, only and last time in three months I've caught up. Everything's in. That sealed envelope holds the last cent I owe this J. & K. Railroad Company. My accounts are balanced. Superintendent Reardon has written me and I've written him. I've told him I was leaving here today. And so I am."

The retiring agent picked up the sealed packet of money and placed it in his inner coat pocket.

"There's an eastbound freight coming along here within the next few minutes," he stated. "I'm leaving on that; going in to see Reardon. You're a J. & K. man. You want to stay here and take charge of this office?"

A sort of horrified expression came into the face of the man from the J. & K. general offices.

"Who? I take charge?" he exclaimed. "No! No, indeed!"

He clearly was nettled; unable to reconcile such a suggestion with the dignity and authority of a general office man.

"Then," said Dan McFall, "you'd better take your little grip and beat it. I hear that drag a-coming—and I sure am going to be on my way!"

Mr. Olyphant took his grip.

WITH Reardon, superintendent of the Midline Division of the J. & K., railroading was just one thing after another. Small wonder his crown was but sparsely settled with hair—and that hair rapidly turning gray. Despite his inherent good-natured disposition he found it increasingly difficult to keep sweet. Just now it was Scandrett, captain of the division's police force, and Cruise, one of Scandrett's officers, who were bringing the wrinkles to his brow.

"This frequent disappearance of small shipments is getting to be serious," said Scandrett. "It's that now, in fact."

The captain of police consulted a small note book.

"Yesterday it was a case of high-priced tobacco. The time before, a carton of expensive chocolates. The time before that, a valuable box of miscellaneous hardware. And so it has gone. One day from this train; the next time from another. A will-o'-the-wisp affair. We try to watch the trains, but there's too many of 'em to have a man on each. The sly —— must know that; he usually manages to get the stuff from some freight not guarded. We've had a couple shots at him; that's the nearest we've come to getting this slick boy."

"It's very annoying," agreed Reardon.

He pinched his lower lip.

"Is the loss high?" he questioned.

"Approximately fifteen thousand dollars, to date," informed Scandrett. "And mounting right along."

"Fifteen thousand!" cried Reardon, incredulously. "You don't mean it?"

"I do," averred the captain of police. "As I said, that's the —— of it; the crook takes nothing but the very highest-priced stuff. It runs up unbelievably."

"Fifteen thousand now—and going up!" said Reardon slowly.

His face betokened how serious he thought the matter.

"You amaze me! The thing must be stopped!"

"It must," assented Scandrett. "That's why I came to see you. I wanted you to know just how the business stands, and that we are doing all we can."

"Just what are you doing?"

"I've detailed Cruise, here, on the case exclusively," replied the police official. "And all the other men I'm keeping on it every minute they can spare."

Reardon nodded and looked at Cruise.

"Have you found anything?" he asked. "Anything to work on that promises results?"

Cruise slowly shook his head, a trifle uncomfortably.

"Practically nothing," he acknowledged. "I've had two glimpses and two pot shots at him. That's the best I've been able to do so far."

"You've no idea who?"

"No. I might have thought he had some inside help. But for all his luck he seems to go at it on the hit-or-miss order. He'll rip open any number of boxes and cases before he seems to find the stuff he wants. That looks like free-lance work."

Reardon was silent for a space.

"It does seem odd."

He appeared to reflect.

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"Well," he said, "I've no doubt you're all doing what you can. We've got to get whoever's doing the work; we may as well face that. The general officers will be dropping on our necks soon if we don't."

Scandrett and Cruise stirred uneasily.

"That's right," said the former.

He scratched his head.

"On me, anyway. 'Produce or get out,' they'll be saying. Couldn't blame 'em, either. I'm worried."

The superintendent hitched his chair a trifle closer to his desk—a sign of dismissal.

"Well," he said, "we'll all have to buck up. Keep at it. There's always the hundred-to-one chance that the thief will slip somewhere, that he'll make some fatal move. You never can tell how soon that'll happen."

The captain of police and his officer departed and Reardon prepared to take up the next thing—a complicated statement of the division's monthly earnings and expenditures. But it turned out that this statement was not to be the next thing on this Wednesday afternoon. Mr. Olyphant, of the revenue department, was the next thing.

"Has McFall been here?" demanded this gentleman, entering the superintendent's office in unmistakable perturbation.

He uttered his question in a whistling breath.

"McFall?" said Reardon, looking up patiently. "Dan McFall, of Hosmer?"

"Yes!" affirmed Olyphant. "He said this morning he was coming in to see you. Has he arrived?"

"No," said Reardon, "he hasn't."

The superintendent looked at the office clock; it pointed to four-forty-five.

"He's probably been delayed," he said mildly. "Was it important?"

"He's quit!" proclaimed the auditor's man indignantly. "Locked up his station and left. Ordered me, in effect, to get out this morning!"

Reardon stared a little, then dropped his eyes. For some reason or other he could not find it in him to consider Dan's action, as embodied in Olyphant's last statement, too awful a misdemeanor. In truth, there was a subdued sparkle in his veiled eyes. But when directly he looked up again his expression was properly sedate.

"Quit," he ruminated aloud. "Well, now. I knew Dan wasn't exactly satisfied. I'm sorry to hear it."

He wiggled a pencil absently.

"You say he started in to see me?" he inquired. "What train?"

"He hopped an eastbound freight," advised Olyphant. "About ten-thirty this morning. I waited till two o'clock and caught the passenger."

"I see," said Reardon. "Well, don't worry. If Dan said he'd be here, he'll be here. I know him that well."

"He had some of the J. & K's. money in his pocket," stated Olyphant, not without some discernible vindictiveness. "He said it was his last remittance. I saw the figures on the envelope. Five hundred and some dollars."

Reardon's eyes fell hard on the auditor's assistant; fell hard and remained there a long moment.

"If you've any idea that Dan McFall has run off with that five hundred dollars," he said, with no gentleness at all, "you'd better forget it." The superintendent could not entirely keep the hostility from his eyes.

"If that's the spirit you exhibited around Dan it's small wonder he ordered you out," he added. "I'm surprized he didn't kick you out!"

The face of the auditor's man burned fiery red.

"Er—ah—" he said. "I— What do you think, then?"

"I think," said Reardon, "just what I said before; something's delayed him. He'll show up, count on that."

He picked up once more the complicated statement of revenues and expenditures.

"Please make certain of the latch as you go out," he said, a trifle wearily. "I've something important here I must look into."

IT WAS pleasant to Dan McFall to ramble along the way to Midline, perched comfortably a-top a J. & K. box car.

The June morning was delicious, filled with the satisfying odors of early Summer. At every stream, in every copse of woods he felt the urge to alight and tarry. Business, he reflected, was a nuisance when so many opportunities to dally presented themselves. A load, however, seemed already lifted from his shoulders, now that he had freed himself from Hosmer agency. Still, he was not entirely free; he must not yet tarry at his own sweet pleasure.

There was the matter of the remittance

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n his pocket; that must be deposited in the Midline bank which handled the J. & K's. unds. And he must see Superintendent Reardon, to explain exactly his leaving. After that, if Reardon could not offer him a proper job, he could take the wide road; he then could pick and choose.

He had been some hours on the road when Extra East 4756 headed into a siding and came to a slow halt. Cray's Siding, it was called; situated in a far-stretching woods. Dan looked at his watch, which showed that it was twelve-forty. He figured that Number Twenty-six, the fast eastbound express, would be about due at this point; therefore Extra 4756 had gone into the clear to let the "varnished cars" by.

The trees on either side of the tracks came down thick and close to the right-of-way. A little breeze ruffled the leaves and made a mild stirring among the branches. Looking down from his car top, Dan noticed that a little trickle of water came tumbling down a narrow course of rocks and moss and passed beneath the tracks through a small culvert. Sparkling water, Dan thought.

"I'm dry," he said to himself. "I'll have a sup of that."

So he climbed down and stepped into the bushes, following the tiny stream until he came to a little, clear pool. He dropped to his knees and drank deeply. He looked up and into the cunning face of a tall, slender, restless-eyed man who stood opposite him, across the little pool of water.

"You certainly were dry, friend," said the fox-faced man softly. "Have you finished?"

There was a glitter in his eyes.

"I have," replied Dan, and noticed that in his long fingers the newcomer held a flat pistol.

Dan's voice was contained, cool, despite the inevitable slight shock arising from the stranger's unexpected appearance. The man, he reasoned quickly, must have been concealed in the undergrowth about. He wondered why, and speculated on the fellow's purpose. That gun was not reassuring; nor its owner's general makeup.

The man nodded, almost exultingly.

"Being a J. & K. policeman," he said, "you'll appreciate the fact that I mustn't delay."

He stepped close to Dan's side, his weapon poised and ready.

"You'd better raise your hands," he instructed.

McFall, perforce, did as ordered. The other ran his fingers quickly over Dan's garments.

"No guns!" he said in surprize. "That's a strange way for an officer to travel about."

"I'm no officer of the law," stated Dan bluntly.

"That may be so," returned the other slowly. His eyes questioned. "If not that, then what?"

Dan smiled.

"I've often wondered that myself."

"You must be a J. & K. man," pursued the pistol toter. "Riding the drag so unconcerned; the shacks didn't seem to bother you any."

He frowned a bit.

"I'd better make certain. Have you anything to identify?" He seemed somehow disappointed.

Dan had a swift feeling of dismay. In his pocket reposed that J. & K. remittance of something over five hundred dollars which he was taking to the Midline bank!

The inquisitor was regarding McFall with eyes now brighter.

"Ho!" he said. "There is something, then! I must see!"

And with that the mind-reader stuck his hand in first one outside coat pocket, then the other. Finding nothing, he flipped back Dan's coat and with clever fingers slipped the long sealed envelope from the inner pocket.

"Consigned to the Midline National Bank," read the clever man. "From Daniel McFall, agent at Hosmer."

His voice was mocking.

"Five hundred thirty-one dollars and seventy-four cents," he said, concluding his reading.

"A remittance, Daniel," he went on then, much pleased. "To be deposited to the credit of the J. & K., no doubt."

McFall nodded, miserably.

"I appreciate your feelings," continued the other with satirical commiseration. "Like all good agents, you hate to see a shipment go astray."

He pretended perplexity.

"I have it; we'll put the case this way. You can tell 'em the shipment didn't go astray. Just say that I reconsigned it. Business is business, right enough; we'll have to do it properly."

And with that the man who held the gun

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stuffed the envelope full of cash into his own pocket.

"There; that's finished."

Dan McFall was getting pretty warm under the collar. The fellow was so cocksure, so smug about it all!

"You're a thief, then!" he exclaimed. "Just a common, plain crook!"

"That's what some folks say," replied the other, seemingly quite unaffronted. "But I protest. I maintain that my work is not altogether without art."

He swelled visibly and Dan perceived he had touched the man's vanity. The latter pointed through the leafy fringe of bushes toward the train of Extra 4756.

"See that train?" he asked. "You do? Well, I'll bet that in some one of those cars I could dig up a tidy box of freight that'd be worth, say, ten dollars a pound. If I wanted, I'd go and get it. But—" the narrator patted his pocket—"I've got five hundred dollars worth of J. & K. stuff right here. That's enough for one day. I never try to play the hog and take it all in at once."

"I s'pose that's where the art comes in," said McFall.

The man might be something of a queer one, but he certainly had the drop just then.

The other had chuckled.

"The J. & K. canned me once," he stated.

"Oh, that's it," said Dan. "Art—but revenge, mostly."

"Art and revenge—and a good living." The despoiler smiled smugly. "I've made my thousands."

Hosmer's late agent fell silent. He could not see that all this was getting him any where. Then abruptly he said—

"You were planning on plucking that box—from Extra 4756?"

The man with the pistol smiled enigmatically.

"Perhaps."

"But why did you hold me up, if you thought I was a bull?"

"Would I be wanting you to butt in?"

A little scowl appeared.

"But wouldn't it have been safer not to show yourself at all?"

"Safer? Yes, probably," admitted the other.

His voice was suddenly hard.

"There's a bull been shooting at me. Twice."

"Oh, I see! You thought I'd be that one. More revenge."

"I thought I might be able to persuade him not to try it again."

Dan was just as pleased that he didn't happen to be that one. But all he said was—

"I expect it'd do no good to ask what you plan doing now?"

The outlaw held up his finger.

"Listen! Number Twenty-six is coming. Wait till she's by and you'll see."

Number Twenty-six passed with a roar. And directly after the express had gone they heard the cars of Extra 4756 jostling as the drag started to pull out of the siding and on to the main line.

"I'm afraid," said the cunning one to his victim, "that you'll have to miss your train."

IT WAS Thursday morning and Dan McFall stood before Superintendent Reardon in the latter's office in Midline.

"I've a poor tale to tell," said Dan, standing with serious face in front of Reardon's desk.

The superintendent regarded the man from Hosmer closely, noting the somber cast of McFall's countenance.

"Tell it," he invited.

"I've been robbed," said Dan.

"Robbed!" said Reardon, his eyes opening wide a moment. "How was that?" he added.

"Of J. & K. money," pursued Dan. "Five hundred thirty-one dollars and seventy-four cents. I had it in my pocket; done up in an envelope, sealed. A remittance; my last one."

He paused there, bitter in his reflection that this, the last string which had bound him to Hosmer agency, should have been the one to bring him such confusion. With it disposed of properly he could have appeared before his superior buoyantly. But now his feet seemed entangled in some treacherous snarl.

"Yes?" urged Reardon.

"I was bringing it in here, to the Midline bank. I'd balanced up my accounts at Hosmer agency and I was leaving right off. The only way I could get the money off my hands was to bring it along and deposit it."

Dan hesitated.

"I'd written you," he explained. "You knew I was leaving Hosmer."

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"I did," affirmed Reardon. "But I didn't believe you were in such a rush to get out."

"I might have waited a day or two longer," admitted Dan slowly. "But yesterday morning something——"

He broke off, then ended—

"You see, I just left."

"I know; I understand," advised Reardon. "Olyphant was in to see me, yesterday afternoon."

A surprizingly swift expression of something like anger came into his face.

"The fool!" he cried in vexation. "I don't blame you—not a bit! Why must these busybodies keep things stirred up—these general office——"

He broke off, checking his torrent of hot words.

Dan McFall had listened in some astonishment. He said nothing. Then Reardon spoke again.

"But this robbery?" he asked. "How did it happen? Where?"

"At Cray's Siding," answered Dan; and forthwith told the details up to the departure of Extra 4756, when he was left behind with the bandit.

"And right after Extra 4756 left," concluded Dan, "he slipped off among the trees. 'I'll be back,' he said, and warned me not to move. I waited till he was out of sight, then moved; he didn't return."

"What did you do then?"

"Hunted round," replied Dan. "Looking for him; trying to get some idea where he'd gone. I found not a trace; haven't any notion where he went. Too much brush, you know; couldn't watch him going."

"Hmmh!" said Reardon, reflecting. "You say he boasted about being able to take something from the train? And about his success?"

"Yes."

"I'll bet," said Reardon then decisively, "that he's the fellow we're looking for!"

"Is there one?" inquired Dan.

"Yes," said Reardon, and gave full details of what Scandrett and Cruise had been telling him Wednesday; also the officers' opinions.

"Probably," agreed McFall after hearing. "Things seem to fit. I ought to've had a gun." He grimaced a bit ruefully. "Lot o' good it would've done me!"

A little tap fell on the door just then. And before they could speak the door had opened and a man had entered—Mr. Olyphant. His eyes popped at sight of Dan McFall.

"Have you got a deposit slip for that five hundred dollar remittance?" he demanded.

His words were abrupt, his voice eager—almost as if he wished that McFall hadn't. If so, he wasn't disappointed.

"No," replied Dan.

"Have you the remittance, then?"

"No," said Dan.

"Where is it?"

"Gone," said Dan.

"Gone where?"

The voice of the auditor's man kept mounting sharply.

"—— knows," said Dan.

The auditor's man struggled to contain himself. He glared at McFall, looked at Reardon. He contemplated Dan again.

"Will you tell me just what you mean?" he asked, with what he thought was freezing coldness.

"I will," said Dan, and did—in the fewest possible words.

His narrative was short, if not sweet; cut to the bone. The auditor's assistant heard him with growing incredulity. McFall finished. Olyphant turned sharply to the superintendent.

"Surely," he exclaimed, "you don't accept this man's story?"

"Why not?" demanded Reardon crossly.

"It's preposterous!" cried Olyphant. "A man met him in the woods and took the money! A man that nobody saw!"

"Nobody but McFall," corrected Reardon with some sarcasm. "Nothing strange about that."

"He can't prove it!"

"You can't disprove it."

The auditor's man raised his hands to high heaven.

"I'll not accept it!" he stormed. "This thing must be looked into!"

He pointed dramatically at McFall.

"Call an officer and have this man placed under arrest!"

"I'll think it over," said Reardon.

"I demand that you do so now—immediately!" cried Olyphant. "I insist upon it!"

The eyes of the superintendent of the Midline Division were like flint as he regarded the excited person who had been handing him orders.

"Young man," said the gray-haired veteran to whom railroading was just one

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thing after another—"Young man, you're from the general offices and it may be that I've no control over your actions. But, on the other hand, your control over my actions, praise be, is no less slight. So now hear this: If you want Danny McFall arrested before I'm ready to have it done, you go do it yourself!"

Olyphant, of the general offices, exhibited a flaming countenance. He fairly squirmed under the veteran's stare and unhurried, scorching words.

"I will!" he almost shouted when Reardon had done. "I'll wire the auditor! I'll get authority!" He flung about to the door. "You'll see!" he spouted, and vanished.

Reardon sighed audibly as the door closed.

"Danny," he said, "it shames the ——! I expect you'd better be on your way; get out of this creature's sight."

"I hate to have to seem to run," returned young McFall.

"I expect that's very true," agreed Reardon. "Still, you'd better vamoose. I can't stop him. A man can't always do as he'd like."

He sighed again, knowing from long years of vicissitudes how extremely correct was that latter observation.

"He's one of those kind, 'Cloaked in a little brief authority'—you know. His chief affliction right now is that you didn't bend the knee to him at Hosmer yesterday."

"Possibly," conceded Dan.

"Indeed, yes!" asserted Reardon, and added gently, "Bless his little heart!"

He raised his voice somewhat, speaking more briskly.

"I don't want to hurry you, Danny; but the sooner you're on your way the bigger your start will be."

"Won't this mean trouble for you?" questioned McFall.

The superintendent spread his hands.

"Don't let anything like that worry you," he said. "I'm old and tricky; I'll come out, never fear."

"I'd not like to think my disappearing would complicate your position," demurred Dan.

"Run along," disclaimed Reardon. "It's not the first time the auditor's office and I have sung different tunes. Part of the day's work, that's all."

"Well," consented Dan, "if it's all right with you I expect I should be going."

He started over the floor.

"I hate to lose you, Danny," said Reardon regretfully. "Sorry to've stuck you there at Hosmer when you didn't want it. If I'd had any idea you were so strong against it I'd have taken you out before this, because I knew that when you took the place you did it just to help us out."

"That's all right," returned McFall.

"No, it's not," declared Reardon. "Not exactly. To make amends I'd put you on a straight telegraph job again, if I could. But I guess I can't, now. Not with this wild man running around loose after you."

It was something over an hour after McFall had gone from the superintendent's office that Reardon's telephone buzzed. He took down the receiver.

"This is the calaboose nominee," said a voice which the superintendent recognized as belonging to Dan. "I was just wondering about something. Which way have those freight shipments been moving—the ones this crook has been picking out? Mostly eastbound, or westbound—or have they been partly both? Can you tell me?"

"I can't, right off," answered Reardon. "But hold the line a few minutes; I'll find out."

The superintendent called Scandrett's office on his private phone, conversed with the police captain, then spoke to Dan again.

"All eastbound stuff," he advised. "What're you after now?"

"Oh, I'm only projecting 'round," replied Dan.

"Got something in view?"

"Well, maybe. I had what you might call an idea, so I thought I'd call you and find out about those shipments."

"Good luck," said Reardon. "Keep under cover; the wild man has his authority and he's out gunning with a couple sleuths."

"Thanks," said Dan. He was silent an instant, then spoke quickly. "And say, if I could sort of produce this lone-handed burglar wouldn't that kind of clear things up for me?"

"You said it!" exclaimed Reardon. "You bring him in and that job is yours!"

"Me for it!" declared Dan and hung up.

It was from an obscure drug store in Midline's dreariest and most remote section that McFall had called the superintendent's office. As he left the pharmacy Dan spoke to himself.

"Lone-handed, my eye!" he said. "I've

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a hunch that man's ripping and smashing into unwanted boxes is a blind to fool thick-headed policemen! Clever stuff! He gets help. It's up to me to get to Hastings Junction."

Hastings Junction was the western terminus of the Midline Division.

IT WAS way in the small hours of Thursday night when Number Seventy-two, one of the J. & K's. fast freights, pulled into the yards at Hastings Junction and came to a stop. There the fast freight changed engines and changed crews.

"There's a car of merchandise for Philly that'll have to be set off," said Conductor Terrell as he handed in his bills preparatory to going off duty. It was in the yardmaster's office he spoke and he addressed Hinchie, the night yard clerk. "C. G. 103221. Got a rough journal."

"All right," replied Hinchie. "I'll have the car inspector stick a new one in and try to get 'er out on Extra 4790. She's bulletined for eight A. M. to go east with some quick despatch stuff."

Conductor Terrell departed; and not long thereafter Number Seventy-two also had gone on her way, C. G. 103221, merchandise, carded Q. D. through to Philadelphia, having been set off "first out" on the Hastings Junction "bad order" track.

Five minutes after Number Seventy-two had gone the night yard clerk took up the manifest of C. G. 103221. He carefully removed the large pin that held the car card to the oblong envelope in which were the waybills covering the various shipments which the car contained. He unfolded the waybills and rapidly began to glance over them.

A rather florid-faced man was Hinchie; not quite thirty and given to sophisticated airs. Off duty he liked to frequent the more sporty rendezvous about Hastings Junction, liked to talk largely of large exploits in which, someway or other, it never failed that he had been outstanding in nerve or sagacity, as the case might be. Now, over the waybills, he paused at a certain entry.

"One case silk sweaters," he read. "Weight, fifty pounds. There. That'll do, fine. Consigned to Howland Company. This'll please Pardee."

A little while later Hinchie left his office. There were as yet no signs of the coming day in the far horizon as the night yard man crossed several tracks in front of the office, then turned west, moving between two long strings of freight cars standing on adjacent sidings. As he started down this stretch a dark shadow crept from the darker shadow of one of the foremost cars and silently followed.

"I may be mistaken—maybe awful bad, too," soliloquized this silently moving figure, "but just as sure as my name's Dan McFall I'm going to play out this hunch of mine. I'll pay strict attention to Hinchie, his words and moves."

Hosmer's late agent had landed in Hastings Junction some hours previous; shortly after nightfall, in fact. A word to an old conductor friend had enabled him to find a snug cubby-hole in an unsealed box car laden with rough lumber; a spot which had proved secure from the prying eyes of any J. & K. policeman. And all the way down from Midline he had pondered over the idea which had come to him—the idea which had prompted him to phone Reardon.

"If the stuff this guy has been picking up has all been eastbound stuff," Dan had reflected, while the car wheels had clicked off their monotonous song, "then he must get some information concerning them somewhere at the west end of the division—providing that my line-up on the workings of the thing is all well and good. And of course the most likely place for him to get the dope would be Hastings Junction; all the stuff stops there in the yards, and it's the only place where a lot of it does stop. Looks plain enough, that part."

He had paused there in his cogitations to rub his head a bit, not unpleased with his deductions.

"Now, let's see," he had resumed. "Who'd be there that'd be able to pick out the dope? Why, somebody in the yard office. The billing would be left there as the trains changed crews and the folks in the yard office could get a peek, if so minded. Say, that don't reason out bad. And who'd it be? Let me think."

He had thought; and had not been long in arriving at a choice. Sam Colston, the day yardmaster, and Talcott, the day clerk, he had quickly rejected as ineligible.

"Sam's too honest," Dan had decided. "Talcott's too thick headed."

And with that plain but sincere analysis he had passed the twain by, leaving but one

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other possibility; Hinchie, the man who had sole charge of the office at night.

"Now there's an individual who might fit," McFall had ruminated. "They say Hinchie's a sport. That's all right. They say he's a four-flusher. That's not all right. Rumor says he talks loud and long about trifles—himself and such like. Dresses too well; spends too much—considering his salary. I might go farther and find no better; I'll look into this man."

So from the time of his arrival in Hastings Junction yards Dan McFall had looked into the actions of Hinchie, the night clerk. He'd had to work carefully, for he had the uncomfortable knowledge that the J. & K. officers were also looking—not for Hinchie, but for Dan himself. But he'd managed it. If one knows yards and cars and the lay of the land he can dodge; and Dan knew all well.

Lying flat on the top of a car he had gazed straight into the front windows of the yard office. He'd been there when Number-Seventy-two came in; saw the bad order car set off—C. G. 103221, full of quick dispatch merchandise; and after Seventy-two's departure had perceived Hinchie's close perusal of the waybills. Dan knew a waybill when he saw one; hence this close attention of the night man had stirred his pulse.

"Looks like!" Dan had breathed. "See him stop there and bend a bit to read that better! Bet he thinks he's struck the pay. He folds 'em up and puts 'em all back. So! What's next?"

He had found out what was next when Hinchie shortly afterward had left the office and started down between the two long strings of cars.

McFall had followed perhaps a hundred yards when suddenly he became aware that Hinchie had stopped. In the gloom the dark blur which was the night clerk's figure was stationary, the sound of footsteps had ceased. Dan himself also halted quickly, then slipped under the nearest car to his left and again crept forward, noiseless as a cat.

Five car lengths he went forward; six, seven. A big black something seemed abruptly to drop down a car ladder not thirty feet distant, swing between two cars and disappear. Dan instinctively had pressed against the side of the car beside him. For all the sound he had heard the figure might have been a ghost. But as the apparition had vanished between the cars McFall had again stolen forward. He heard voices, low and guarded. He paused.

"C. G. 103221," he heard, and recognized the speaker as Hinchie. "Fifty pound case silk sweaters. Howland Company, Philly. Set off on bad order track, first out. Goes east on Extra 4790 this morning."

"What time?"

"Eight."

"Good! I'll look after it."

"You didn't get around last night."

"No. Thought I'd better lay low."

There was a short chuckle.

"I picked up five hundred dollars of J. & K. cash. Was afraid it might stir up the bulls too much, so I thought I'd keep off. Been stepping so easy I haven't even gone near the hangout since, so didn't get to cache the coin. I'm still packing it. Want your split now?"

"No hurry. I'd just as soon wait till Sunday and get it all in a lump. Got to be careful while I'm here on the job."

"All right. I'll meet you and we'll make a general divvy. I'll have to tell you how I got this kale. It's rich!"

"How?"

"Not now; take too long. Don't forget to come around Sunday."

"Sure."

The voices ceased. The nimble figure did not again appear, but Dan had no doubt that Hinchie's companion had gone, in some other direction. He heard the sound of feet moving back toward the office and judged that would be the yard clerk.

McFall did not at once move himself. His brain was busy. Subdued as that second voice had been, there yet was a timbre in it which he had detected. And the reference to the five hundred! There could be no question.

"The very bucko!" said Dan. "The clever one! What luck—what bully luck!" He grinned in the dark. "Looks like I'll be traveling east again, soon—on Extra 4790."

He grinned again; just a trifle grimly this time.

"It was rich, was it? Well, all right. But when I come this time, big boy, look out!"

ON FRIDAY Extra East 4790 did not pause at Cray's Siding as Extra East 4756 had paused on Wednesday. Extra 4790 wheeled by the siding with complete indifference and Dan McFall,

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from the inside of the empty box car directly behind C. G. 103221, peeped out and wondered if after all the freight would make it from Hastings Junction to Midline without a stop; or, in other words, if the light-fingered bandit of the previous day would be afforded no opportunity to demonstrate what he could do in regard to the coveted shipment in C. G. 103221. It began to look that way, with Midline but fifteen miles distant.

There apparently were no J. & K. police on the extra, for Dan had failed thus far to see any. Neither, for that matter, had he had a glimpse of Hinchie's partner. Nevertheless Dan had no doubt that somewhere on the train the despoiler was, like himself, concealed. At the proper time, if the proper time presented itself, he would demonstrate.

McFall heard the engine whistle deep and long for a block signal ahead. That would be, Dan knew, "HK" tower. He waited to hear the two whistles which would mean that the signal had been swung, permitting the train to proceed. But the two blasts did not come. The extra suddenly began to slacken its speed, preparing to stop in response to the adverse block. Slowly and more slowly the train went—stopped. Dan peeked out the door of his car. Hinchie's partner was already busy.

The spry man must have been concealed somewhere under C. G. 103221; very probably on the rods. Dan's peering gaze beheld him just emerging from under the car. The bold thief lost not a second.

"I'm right," said Dan to himself as the man straightened up. "It's the same lad!"

Erect, the crook's swift fingers twined about the tin car seal, twisted; the seal dropped to the ground. The supple fingers grasped the car door handle; the door slid back about two feet. Into the narrow opening the man, with surprizing agility, disappeared.

Dan thought swiftly. Up and down the track not a person was in sight—trainman or any one. No habitation was near, not even the tower being in sight, for it happened the train had stopped on a slight curve and the door of C. G. 103221 which the bandit had opened was on the outer, or convex side of the curve.

C. G. 103221 was a box car of the very latest type; all steel—sides, doors, roof. As Dan contemplated it a sudden idea shot into his head; an idea not without its humorous points.

"By Jing!" he ejaculated softly—and immediately dropped from his car to the ground.

Hinchie's partner was still out of sight, still within C. G. 103221 looking for that important box marked Howland Company, Philadelphia. McFall glided forward, keeping his body pressed close to the cars. His eager right hand came in contact with the near edge of the open door on C. G. 103221. He gathered his muscles, heaved stoutly. With a clang the steel door banged shut; and in an instant he had slipped the door clasp into place.

"Done!" whispered Dan with elation.

He heard one swift, quickly suppressed exclamation within the car, a sort of thump against the door. Then all was quiet. Hinchie's partner was trapped—but he certainly was a cool one. Not another sound came from him. Dan admired his nerve, waiting so silently in the closed car—waiting to see what would ensue. Perhaps he even hoped that his presence within was unknown; that in some as yet undesignated way a chance for him to escape would present itself. Anyway, no further betraying sound came from the interior of C. G. 103221.

"That sure makes a fine cage!" chuckled Dan silently. "An excellent calaboose!"

And with that latter expression came another brilliant thought.

The engine ahead was calling for the flag; Extra 4790 was ready to proceed. Scrambling back into his own private car, Dan searched his pockets for a scrap of paper. He found a small notebook and rapidly scribbled therein with a stub of pencil.

By the time he had finished writing Extra 4790 was on its way. Tearing out the leaf on which he had written he folded it and watched from the door as the car approached the tower. An old acquaintance, Charlie Coynes, was on duty at "HK" and he was peering from the office window as McFall's car drifted by. Catching Coynes' eye, Dan held up the note, then tossed it toward the office. The operator recognized McFall, for he raised his hand in greeting. And Dan, looking back, saw Coynes emerge and pick up the little square of paper.

"Good boy, Charlie!" said Dan. "You'll see that through, I know."

He leaned from his car and regarded the

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side of the car ahead, C. G. 103221. He pictured a disconsolate, speculating figure in the gloomy interior, probably seated among the widely varied collection of boxes, bales and barrels therein, endeavoring to figure things out.

"That five hundred buck stunt was rich, eh?" said Dan gently. "Rich—maybe. But if it was I'd like to know what you'd call this!"

He dwelt upon it at length and enjoyed the situation no less because he failed to find a word that suited him. And presently he thought of another matter.

"He said they'd divvy Sunday," he reflected. "And he's still packing it. Won't that be fine!"

MR. OLYPHANT, of the auditor's office, threatened to become an insufferable bore. Friday afternoon early he appeared in Superintendent Reardon's office, complaining and protesting. Reardon, his patience waning, began to wonder if twelve good men and true would not make allowances—providing the case were properly presented—if something heavy did befall the auditor's man; something heavy enough to silence that wagging tongue for a space, at least.

"But where has he gone?" persisted the annoying one.

It was amazing how closely the voice approached a whine.

"Probably east or west or north or south," answered Reardon as evenly as possible.

His eyes roved about the office.

"I don't see him here anywhere."

"Have you made any effort to locate him?" demanded Olyphant.

But Reardon apparently was busy jotting a notation on a piece of correspondence and did not answer. So Olyphant pressed again—

"Have you made any effort to locate him?"

The superintendent raised his head.

"I heard you the first time," he said, his voice still calm but all at once cold and hard. "And I may as well tell you something now as later. I'm sick of your pestering and questions. I don't know where Dan McFall is today; I don't know where he will be tomorrow, or any other day. As to whether or not I've tried to locate him, that's my affair. When it's necessary for me to advise you of every move I make I may do it. But I'll tell you right here that the pressure'll have to be considerably stronger than it is now."

Olyphant seemed to get the idea. His countenance went several hues in quick succession.

"He's stolen over five hundred dollars of the J. & K's. funds," he asserted sullenly.

"That's where we differ," declared Reardon. "I say he hasn't stolen one cent."

"It's gone," mumbled Olyphant. "I've instructions from my office to have him apprehended."

"I've heard that before—" began Reardon wearily, when his office door opened and a boy entered and placed a message clip on the superintendent's desk.

Reardon glanced at it, then picked the message up for more careful inspection. His brow wrinkled as if he were momentarily puzzled. Then quickly he broke into a low, hearty laugh.

"By ginger! Who'd have thought it!"

He looked at Olyphant a minute, then reached for his telephone and asked for the despatcher's office.

"What time do you expect Extra East 4790 to arrive?" he inquired. "About two-fifteen. All right."

He hooked up the receiver and turned to Olyphant again.

"You come back here about two o'clock," he directed the auditor's man. "Bring a couple of policemen, if you like."

"Have you heard something—about McFall?" said Olyphant eagerly.

"You wait and see," stated Reardon. Then he added. "But I'll admit this much: It certainly looks like we were going to catch a crook!"

After Olyphant had gone the superintendent again perused the message and once more chuckled aloud. This is what he read:

SUPT. REARDON,
MIDLINE.

Bring the wild man and his cops and meet me in Midline yards on arrival Extra East 4790. Bringing in the exonerator.

THE CALABOOSE NOMINEE.

THERE was a reception committee of four gathered not far from the office in Midline yards when Extra East 4790 pulled in and stopped at precisely two-fifteen Friday afternoon. There were Superintendent Reardon, Olyphant, Captain of Police Scandrett and Officer Cruise.

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As the extra stopped they perceived a man hop from a box car some little distance in the rear of the engine.

"That's McFall," announced Reardon and started toward him.

"Shall we nab him?" questioned Scandrett.

"Heavens, no!" said Reardon. His eyes twinkled as he regarded Olyphant. "Not yet, anyway."

The four came up to McFall. Dan, standing beside C. G. 103221, grinned amiably.

"I've got the goods," he said to Reardon.

"Where?" asked the superintendent, returning the grin.

"In here," said Dan, and jerked back the door of C. G. 103221.

The door had no more than opened when something shot out of the car—something that went through the air like a huge leaping cat. Only this was a man who landed on the ground, arms and legs asprawl. In an instant the leaping one was up, set to go. But Dan McFall landed on his back just then and down the two of them went.

The ashes and cinders flew as the pair rolled over and over, arms and legs flying.

"Hold him, Danny!" shouted Reardon.

Danny held; and suddenly the struggling ceased with him sitting astraddle his exhausted opponent's stomach.

"I'll have that five hundred back, if you've still got it," said Dan to him and thrust his hand inside the other's coat. In a second he had brought forth a long sealed envelope, badly rumpled, one end torn open, but still decidely plump.

"We'll have to count it," said McFall.

He eyed the man beneath him.

"You didn't divvy soon enough. Not so rich now, eh?"

But the nimble crook, though plainly recognizing McFall, said nothing. So Dan looked up at the four surrounding him and extended the packet to the gaping Olyphant.

"Count it," said Dan, thrusting the remittance into Olyphant's hands.

"What—" stammered Olyphant. "What is this?"

"I think it's the five hundred I didn't take. Count it and see."

So Olyphant, beginning to comprehend, counted with nervous fingers, spilling and dropping bills for the others to pick up. But the tally was correct.

"Five hundred thirty-one dollars and seventy-four cents," announced the auditor's man. He looked at McFall's captive. "And—and this is——"

"Yes," said Dan. "The man who did take it."

He twisted his head around to look at Captain of Police Scandrett.

"I s'pose you'll want him, chief. I expect you've got a lot of things chalked up against him."

"What's that?" asked Scandrett, producing a pair of handcuffs.

"He was after a shipment in there today," exclaimed Dan, pointing to C. G. 103221. "So after he crawled in I just pushed the door shut on him and brought him in. Seems like he and Hinchie, night yard man at Hastings Junction, have been snitching shipments right along."

"What!" cried Scandrett, now fully realizing. "You don't mean this is the fellow we've been after for so long?"

"I believe it is!" spoke up Cruise, peering hard.

"I'm sure it is," said Dan easily. "Here, take hold of him."

As Scandrett and Cruise took hold Dan McFall arose and dusted his clothing, almost casually. Then he looked at Superintendent Reardon.

"Did I do a job?" he asked mildly.

Reardon regarded Olyphant.

"Did he?"

There was the hint of a twinkle in Reardon's eyes. And yet behind the twinkle lurked something coldly compelling.

At the superintendent's question the auditor's man had moistened his lips with his tongue. Standing there with both fists full of cash, there was but one answer he could give. But he didn't speak his answer; he could but nod his head.

The superintendent's open palm smote McFall such a lusty clout of approval that Dan almost staggered.

"It's unanimous!" cried Reardon. "You did! Come along. I've another one for you!"

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A Shot at a Venture

By Captain Dingle

A Three-Part Story Part I

Author of "The Burial of Billy," "Joe Monkeyface," etc.

CHAPTER I

IRRITATION SETS IN

HAD anybody ever suggested to Red Saunders that he was an irritant, he would have smiled that quiet, guileless smile of his —thereby perhaps sadly irritating the suggestor; but he was, nevertheless, a thorn in the side of petty officialdom in three continents and many colonies, and a mighty sharp, barbed thorn too.

The most recent official, and therefore best qualified to express an opinion regarding the sharpness of the thorn's penetrative powers, was Herr Koesch, the obese representative of the German Trading Company which governed at one time that part of Papua then under the red, white, and black tricolor. No doubt Herr Koesch suffered considerably from local effects, for Finschaven at best was ever a pestilential excrescence upon the map of empire, and his brother agents in the slightly less objectionable settlements of Astrolabe Bay and Friedrich Wilhelm's Haven looked down upon him from their respective pinnacles of greatness with a smug condescension that heated his choler painfully close to the flash-point.

To have a cool, pink-faced, six-foot-two giant with hair that outblazed the Papuan sun, stride into his little furnace of an office, sit upon the table, blow aromatic smoke into his goggling eyes, and calmly announce that, under any circumstances whatever, the august majesty of the Papuan Trading Company was required to furnish official protection——

"Get oudt mine office from!" yelled Herr Koesch, palpitating with heat, fat, and rage like a poorly set blanc-mange. "I gif you one hour your anchor to pull up. I gif you d'ree minute yourselluf to take mine office from. I gif——"

Red Saunders removed his big white solar topi, set it upside down against the official stationery cabinet on the table, chucked a pair of unused white gloves into it, and smiled amiably into the purpling face before him. Outside, visible, audible, and smellable through the open windows and doorway, the life of the little village masquerading as a town moved lazily, buzzed industriously, and smelled abominably in the heat of stagnant noon.

A few portly white men moved away from the verandas of offices which were being closed by scowling Papuans whose cannibal upbringing had not fitted them to play office boys and store hands to the beefy invader from the Vaderland. Many a wooly pate harbored the keen hope that some day, before teeth gave out and bellies shrank, a new flag, one which did not frown on the satisfying of natural appetites for well-nurtured flesh simply because it happened to walk on two legs instead of four, would fly over Papua.

"My fat, liver-laden friend," said Saunders with a smile as sunny as the broad day, "I shall dictate to you what you will give

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me. You seem to have more time to give than anything else, but I decline, with many thanks, the one hour and three minutes you offer me. I have no need for homeopathic doses of time. I take time as I want it, and men as I find 'em. I hoped to find my new landlord a more active man, because my landlords usually keep busy. But since it can't be helped, you'll——"

"Landtlordt! *Der Teufel!* I vouldn't haf you for a tenant, efen ouf mine pigsty, not for——"

"Leave your poor relations in the pigsty," grinned Saunders cheerily. "Cool off, old chap, before the sun strikes you sillier than you are. I'm your tenant, whether you like it or not, and I want official protection. I'm going up the river to develop trade, and——"

"Vat riffer?" screamed the frenzied German, rumpling his straw-colored hair in bewilderment.

"Kaiserin Augusta!"

"*Ach! Mein Gott!*" moaned Koesch, stumbling out of his chair and staggering over to the door.

Saunders regarded him amusedly, lighting another big cigar and sending billows of smoke toward the door through which, in spite of Herr Koesch's bulk, he could still discern the graceful lines of his little schooner, the *Black Pearl*, at anchor.

The headwaters of Kaiserin Augusta River run through what was then German territory, and reach, or start, very close to the boundary of Holland's portion of Papua. It's no earthly use looking for corroboration of this statement on any map, because Papua is still *terra incognita* except along the coast; but it may be taken as a fact, nevertheless, and the yarn of which Red Saunders, Herr Koesch, and the footstool of old Chief Nuanou form the vital parts, can be verified by any adventurer who chooses to seek out either of the parties.

Seeing that little chance remained of Herr Koesch recovering his equanimity until the cool of the evening, and having plenty of time at his own disposal, Red Saunders left the office with a chuckle of delight at the German's fiery visage, promising to return later.

"Put down in your notebook, Herr Koesch, that Captain Saunders, of the *Black Pearl*, has taken a lease of your land at the head of the Kaiserin Augusta River for one year, and requires official protection over the parts of the river he must pass to get to his leasehold," he remarked.

"I haf not leased!" yelled the agent frantically. "I tell you I vill not haf you for mine tenant, py ——! Rader I voudt see you py der cannibals cooked und eaden, py *Teufel!* Gome pack here und——"

Saunders strode down toward his boat on the palm fringed beach, shaking with amusement. Somnolent savages, liverish whites, lurking dogs, and a myriad of parrots and monkeys protested raucously at the sustained uproar emanating from Herr Koesch's office door; but to them all Saunders presented a smiling face which was not in the least darkened or dulled at sight of his boat's crew, waiting patiently about their craft, under the militant guardianship of a native soldier who handled his gun with all the pompous threat of the master he served.

"All right, lads, get her afloat," the skipper sang out as he approached the boat. As he might ask about some strange visitor to his schooner he nodded toward the soldier.

"Friend of yours, boys?"

"No sar!" grinned Tommy, the Gilbert Island bosun, with a vast exhibition of shining teeth. "He say we arrest, sar."

Saunders gazed curiously at the black soldier, who stood erect as a ramrod, handling his firearm belligerently as taught by his militaristic tutors. Without making any sign of displeasure, he stepped into his boat, as if to seat himself at the tiller, and the soldier placed the musket across his chest, and pushed him back.

"You stop behime, cappan," the man said gutturally.

Saunders gently pushed the gun away.

"You stop, sar!" snapped the black, shifting grip on his musket and charging the chamber. "Orders ob Herr Koesch! Dat ship, dis boat, yousellup, all pris'ner——"

"Oh, shove off, boys!" grunted Saunders impatiently.

He seized the gun by the barrel, jammed the cigar he was smoking tightly into the muzzle, and took his seat in the boat. With hearty grins the crew ran the craft into the sea, leaped in, and took to their oars, while the soldier, after a moment of wide-eyed, wide-mouthed amazement, clapped his gun to his shoulder and fired.

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"There you are!" the skipper laughed.

The black soldier staggered under the unexpected recoil, and the barrel of his gun swelled out in a bulge where the bullet stopped, the gases retained by the stuffed muzzle keeping back the missile. The soldier dropped the weapon, rubbed first his shoulder, then his eyes, and glared after the boat wherein sat the wizard who could render his gun not only harmless to an enemy but a source of painful bruises to a friend and wielder.

Even the boat's crew stared at their beloved skipper rather in awe, for, great as they believed him to be, he had never yet revealed any such magic as this to them.

"Don't goggle at me that way, boys," he laughed again at their faces. "No magic about that trick. Those Germans don't trust Papuan savages with real rifles, soldiers or not. Look at the chap's eyebrows —burned off! Stopping the muzzle of a gas-pipe gun like that prevents the bullet leaving the tube and blows out the breech-block. Look at his scalp; he hasn't felt it yet; he's got an ivory skull; but I'll bet he's got a swelled head in the morning! Give way, lads!"

IT WAS gray, cool twilight when the schooner shifted her berth and anchored two hundred fathoms nearer the beach. At her rail stood grim old Tod Carter, companion of Saunders for twelve hectic years and still loyal, watching with the inevitable shake of the grizzled old head his skipper's shoreward passage. The skipper's cheery hand-wave at half distance failed, as it ever failed, to eradicate the gloom from the mate's deep-lined face. Only in the thick of a real, man-to-man scuffle against long odds did Tod Carter emerge from the shell of pessimism in which he buried his real self.

Saunders stepped ashore on the beach a quarter of a mile distant from the office he was bound for, leaving his men as before in close charge of the boat. This trip they were armed, though not ostentatiously, and had orders not to start any trouble; but it was a long way from the intention of Red Saunders to have his boat, crew, or person held up by any petty official in Papua, no matter under what flag he sheltered. He strode off alone, as before, in no more fear of mishappenings than if he were walking through the park of his home city.

At the end of a long thicket of wild banana out of which long, feathery palms reared like crested flamingoes in the dusk, he struck off across a grassy level toward the huddled structures of the town. As he neared the outer buildings, he lighted a stronger cheroot and wrinkled his nose and pursed his lips, for the poisonous exhalations of Mother Earth rose strongly after sundown. And as he paused, from the darkness to his left came the dull moan of a man in extreme agony.

Notwithstanding the reputation bestowed upon him by the outer world of being a hard case, Saunders was ever sympathetic toward suffering, intolerant toward cruelty, and absolutely without scruple regarding interference where brutality was concerned. He hesitated not a second at the sound of that moan, but plunged in that direction, heedless of gathering darkness, intent only upon finding whoever uttered it.

He heard it again, and it rose to a yell. There were other sounds, too, sounds of blows, and another human voice mouthing savage curses in a language that caused him faint surprize, for since dropping anchor off Finschaven he had seen no white man but Germans, and this cursing voice uttered English words.

More angry than suffering humanity had made him, he leaped forward in the gloom and hurled himself like a great cat upon a figure that crouched and whose arm, wielding a heavy cane like a flail, beat madly at another figure prostrate on the ground. From the ground came the moans, subdued now. The thud of blows only ceased when Saunders gripped the cane with a hand that knew no superior in power, and with his other hand seized the crouching figure by the throat.

Without a word the skipper twisted the stick loose, gripped it himself, and, retaining his clutch on the other's throat, began to belabor him as savagely as a moment before he had been belaboring the unseen sufferer on the ground. On head, shoulders, and face the blows fell heavily, and incoherent, drunken curses preceded the sudden yelp of pain that surely resulted from such a beating.

"Blast you, I'll have your heart for this, whoever you are!" yelled the man.

Something in the voice caused Saunders to hold his hand.

"Who are you?" he gritted, with the stick raised in mid-air.

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"I'll —— soon show you in daylight!" the other swore.

"I'll see now," retorted the skipper.

He tucked the stick under his arm, and fumbled in his pocket for the electric torch he always carried. Like a flash his captive swung a terrific punch, caught Saunders beneath the ear, and sent him staggering sidewise. In another second the man was gone, long before the torch cast its white light on the ground and revealed the panting form of a bleeding islander, his body a gridiron-patterned mass of bloody weals. Vaguely puzzled by that departing voice, irritated rather than angered by the blow under the ear, Saunders knelt down and flashed his light on the scowling face of the native sentry whom he had so unceremoniously set aside earlier in the afternoon at his boat.

"Oh, the swine, the swinish brute!" he muttered, taking out his handkerchief and gently cleaning the edges of a wide, ragged pent-house-eave of skin and flesh that hung down from the man's scalp over his eyes.

Blood streamed down his face, and the native's eyes were the eyes of a cornered beast. The scalp flap was easily recognized as that caused primarily by the flying breech-block of the gun Saunders had stuffed his cigar into; the present condition of it could easily be traced to the savage beating the man had but just received.

"What he beat you for, Jacko?" asked the skipper, pressing the ugly wound together and forming a bandage of his handkerchief.

The savage glared up at him in sullen distrust, until something in the deep, musical voice reassured him, and then he muttered—

"He beat me fo' I let you go 'way."

"He?" exclaimed Saunders, incredulously. "What he try for stop me for? Who is he, sonny?"

"Me not knowing, massar, but he sent by Massar Koesch, alla same. I t'ink he kill me tomollow. He kill you bimeby, s'pose you no git gone. All ri', sar. I go now. G'bye."

With the stoicism of sheer worship of Fate, the islander staggered to his feet and disappeared among the bushes as if nothing in the shape of bodily pains had visited him since birth.

"Now for Koesch, a show-down and revelations," grinned Red, staring at the black shadow where the man melted from view.

He pocketed his torch, but charged the chamber of his automatic pistol, and marched swiftly along to the office of Herr Koesch. But, far from a revelation, he found he had but stumbled upon the beginning of his quest when he confronted the portly agent behind a big porcelain pipe, smiling greasily and nodding affably at the man whom he had, not long before, declined for a tenant of his pigsty.

"Goot efening, captain," gurgled Herr Koesch, fatly. "Sit down. Schmoke a goot cigar? Yah, dot iss goot!"

Saunders smiled back innocently, took the proferred chair by the back with one hand, but before sitting down he made a swift sliding step over to the window, snatched the curtain aside, and thrust out his head. He was smiling as he reapproached the desk, and sat down without saying anything of what was in his mind. He knew that he had seen, framed in that window, the face of a man not Papuan, not European, hard to identify except by reason of pure ugliness of features and a gash of a mouth that had seemed to be the acme of cruelty. He faced Herr Koesch with a bland smile, and accepted the proferred light.

"Vell, captain, it vas misoonderstanding vot ve had, *jah?* Maybe ve come bedder togedder py a leetle chat, no?"

CHAPTER II

THE HAUNTING FACE

TWO months before confronting Herr Koesch with a demand for protection, Red Saunders had penetrated to the headwaters of the Kaiserin Augusta River, forcing his way with a half dozen of his Gilbert Island crew to the mountain fastnesses where the stream began as a trickle of sparkling water issuing from a forbidding cliff whose precipices were clothed in rhododendrons, like some scarred and age-withered hag who has rifled the wardrobe of a deposed empress.

Against the unknown perils of a savage and unknown land he had striven tenaciously, forging forward and upward in spite of head-hunters and cannibals, giant savages and pigmies, helped timorously at rare intervals by gentler savages whose presence so near to their bloodthirsty neighbors seemed to constitute an inexplicable anomaly. Thus he had won to the region that had been his goal for many years.

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From Hakodate to Hobart Town, from Suva to Java Head men spoke of Nuanou, the prime chief of all Papua, to whom cannibal and coast fisherman, pigmy and painted giant alike owed secret allegiance, whose territory no white man could reach, whose treasures of paradise plumes and dried heads and bone necklets were paltry trifles compared with a throne and footstool such as Solomon and Sheba never knew.

The hint of impossibility had whetted his curiosity, as it ever could do; the tales of a prize worth winning sounded rather less dreamlike than others he had heard, and a diplomatic desire for seclusion, succeeding a certain exploit in Ceram, decided him to see for himself at once whether the prize and the impossibility were realities.

Right up there in the back-yard of Creation, where the very mountains growled and verdure itself seemed to spring from the forbidding womb of a poisonous troll, Saunders found a white man. Rather he was a sunburned, haggard parody of a white man so far as color and flesh were concerned; but his eyes were blue and clear, his tall frame sinewy and straight, and the crisply clipped words of perfect English he spoke when greeting the skipper were those of a cultured man—culture spelled with a "C"—although palpably a Teuton.

An Oxford man himself, with Eton back of that, and a pedigree which included more than a few Crusaders in it, Red Saunders recognized a fellow man at the same time as he recognized a racial enemy, and before he had been ten minutes in the man's company he was drinking warm whisky-and-water with him. Thirty minutes after that the pair were silently, purposefully waging a terrific fist fight for possession of the land whereon they fought.

"What's the use of hammering each other," Saunders grinned through split lips in an enforced interval while his opponent retrieved and rebelted his nether garments. "I'll buy your blooming land, or a share in it——"

"You're the fifth man who's tried to bother me with partnership," returned the other, as pleasantly. "I shall shoot the next man on sight, Saunders, if I whip you. If you whip me I shall carry out my agreement with you, sign over my concession, accept your price, and take myself off the ground. But I believe I can slog that grin from your face, —— you! And old Nuanou's footstool certainly exists, for I've seen it——"

The fight had gone to a gory finish, for Saunders was inclined to believe his opponent. It was only toward the climax, in face of certain defeat, that the ineradicable traits of the man's race came out in spite of years of schooling in other manners, and he tried to win with the knee where fists failed. The red skipper met the familiar trick by crossing his own shin against his opponent's, snapping the attacker's shinbone at the same instant that he connected solidly with a right uppercut to the chin. The fight was finished, and he had a crippled, beaten man on his hands in the midst of a hostile country.

But Herman Neuman had lived long enough among real men to know the merit of keeping a given word, and he lived up to his agreement. Saunders in turn had carried him down to civilization for medical treatment, and had left him in comfortable quarters at Astrolabe Bay while he sailed around to get his transferred lease approved by the owner, Herr Koesch, and to request official sanction for his exploration trip in order that much annoyance might be avoided while traveling through the many and variously governed districts between the coast and the mountains of the hinterland.

He sat rubbing his ear, smiling at the hope expressed by Koesch that they might draw together by a brief conversation. He laughed happily as his fingers discovered a sizable lump under the ear. Koesch frowned slightly.

"Bumped my ear, looking out of your window," smiled the skipper. "Thought I saw one of my men sneaking outside, that's why I poked my head out. Fancy, that's all. Serves me right. How about the business, Herr Koesch? Glad to hear you've formed a better opinion of me. Do I get your approval to the transfer made over to me by Neuman?"

"Vat did jou pay for it, captain?"

"Among other things a sum of cash, a broken leg, and a —— good licking."

"*Was!*" exclaimed Koesch, half leaping from his chair, fat as he was, his round blue eyes goggling. "Den jou neffer got the lease from Herman Neuman, py ——"

"Big chap—two inches taller than me—curly hair—" recited Saunders pleasantly, gazing through his cigar smoke at the dingy ceiling.

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"*Ach!* It iss von bik lie! Herman void eat jou alife!"

Slowly, smiling brightly, Saunders tipped the heavy table over, pinning the round, purple-faced agent under it on the grimy floor. Then he sat on the edge, peered down at the groaning German, and asked politely:

"Did I understand you to say Neuman's transfer is all right? You switched off into native dialect, I'm afraid. Just what did you say?"

His two-hundred pounds of healthy manhood pressed down upon the capsized table, and Herr Koesch gasped for breath. Waving a pudgy hand imploringly he induced Saunders to ease the weight.

"*Mein Gott!*" he panted. "Take jouself luf mine house from! I shall gome your ship upon tomorrow und sign der transfer for you. Go avay, you ret deffil! *Ach!* I mine pack iss ge-broken!"

"Did you say you'd sign it now, here? I have it with me. I went aboard my schooner on purpose to get it for you."

The table pressed downward again, Herr Koesch grunted in dire discomfort; and with a groan he capitulated.

"And you indorse it, asking your company's agents to give me passage through their——"

"*Gott im Himmel*, anyting!" snarled the agent, snatching paper and pen toward him again. He wrote with feverish rapidity. The words were beyond objection, and Saunders smiled his thanks. The serenity of the big sailor was more than Herr Koesch could endure without a parting shot. As Saunders swung out of the door:

"*Verdammt* crook!" he yelled. "Vy you don't keep your own territory in for your ropperies? Hey? Vy aind't der Fly riffer goot enough for you? Py ——, I tink something shall to you happen preddy soon!"

"I hate annoying my own people," grinned Saunders, peering in through the window as he passed. "If you think you've left anything out of these papers that should go in, come aboard before I sail. If I have any trouble about your permit I'll be back like a shot and pull the roof on you instead of the table."

His impressions of the fat agent should have warned him to indulge in a little more caution than was his custom, but he strode along the dark lanes whistling cheerily, tenderly rubbing his ear and wondering mildly if he would ever meet the man who dealt him that lusty punch.

"Some wallop for a drunk!" he muttered smilingly. "Must be quite a man when sober. Like to meet him."

While yet he was chuckling over the man's easy escape after so savagely beating the Papuan, something whizzed past his shoulder and clattered to the ground with a clang.

"Knife!" the skipper jerked out, familiar with every kind of steel weapon formed for throwing.

He caught his breath shortly at the extreme scantiness of margin by which it had missed him, but almost before the steel ceased to ring he had bounded toward where it must have come from, and a grunted oath told of a discovery. Framed in a dark window, like an old painting in a time-worn frame of oak, was a face—a face neither European nor Papuan, but wearing an expression of stark, bestial cruelty which was enhanced by a ragged gash of a mouth brokenly filled with yellow fangs.

Steel flashed again as the skipper leaped for the window and he dodged to avoid it. He heard a smothered ejaculation within the black gloom of the hut, and a scuffle. Diving into the impenetrable darkness of the interior, snatching for pistol and torch, he felt something brush against him and heard the crackling rip of a cane wall bursting under great weight. Then his torch flashed, the grimy place was flooded with blinding light, and he sprang forward and grappled with a dark shape just disappearing through the wall.

The man squirmed in his grasp, uttered something in frenzied Papuan, and struggled fiercely. But Saunders had gripped him with intent to hold, and the man gave up, turning around to reveal the bruised face and broken head, wealed back and lacerated breast of the native the skipper had saved from a savage beating that very night.

"By the Great Bunyip! So you want to kill——"

"Me no kill you, sar, me wantee kill uller man," the native muttered.

His cheek was bleeding profusely from a fresh wound, his chest heaved with labored breathing as if after a tremendous struggle. Saunders regarded him keenly, and slowly let his grip relax.

"No, sonny," he muttered, "I don't believe you want to kill me. You're no

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beauty, but the face I saw just now at the window, and the face I saw awhile back at Koesch's are the same, and neither of 'em is yours. What fashion all this, hey?"

Much of what he had said was as Greek to the Papuan, but he understood the question.

"I folla you, sar. I see fella wid plenty knife folla you. I crawl insi' here an' see oller fella thlow knife fo' you, but no can catch him. He run fas' an' I hol' his cloth, but you catch me an' he go 'way."

"Come with me. Let's see if we can find the blighter!"

"I t'ink he go fo' tree, sar. He dlop outa tree when I see him. Maybe more better go 'way."

Saunders laughed shortly. Peer as he would he saw nothing but a vast black emptiness before him, and the dense foliage overhead was as impenetrable.

"You seem a bit of a logician, Jacky. I think you're right."

HE MOVED off toward the beach, and the native padded along beside him.

"All ri', sar. Me good 'gician. Do work on schooner. I go longa you. You my boss."

Now Saunders did not wish to take anybody away from Finschaven with him. Generally he could find room and a job for any poor human who needed either work, rest, or refuge; but he wanted to take no chances in this quest. He glanced down at the silent figure beside him, saw the glistening streak of blood running down the glossy body clear to the ground, and as the gloom became less opaque when the path ceased at the open beach he saw again the terrible scars of that recent beating. He heard, too, the stoical native's breath whistling between his set teeth as the dank chill of night penetrated the burning sores.

Many and many a time had he won for himself sterling adherents by a simple act of humanity, and sometimes he had also acquired useful knowledge by the same act. His curiosity was already piqued by the haunting suggestion of familiarity about the voice of the man he had interrupted while beating the Papuan, and also by the yellow-fanged gash of a mouth in that demoniacal face that seemed to be bent upon thrusting itself in his way. If anybody other than Herr Koesch could tell him about either, it would surely be Jacky. Besides, Jacky's hurts sorely needed attention.

"All right, sonny," he said, patting the frizzy head of the panting savage. "You come aboard. But you're a soldier, ain't you? S'pose they come look for you?"

"Me no soldier. Fat German say me go take gun likee soldier fo' stop you. Ploper soldier he come tomollow."

"H'm!" grunted the skipper, a light flashing upon his problems. "So Herr Koesch was afraid the real soldiers wouldn't stop me on his pretext, and tried a bluff with you, hey, Jacky?" The native grunted responsively. "Well, well! The fat little schemer!"

The boat lay a short distance off the beach in clear water, and came in swiftly at the skipper's soft hail. He stood awaiting it, shaking with some deep, intense amusement. His crew accepted Jacky with no more remark than if he had been a boon companion of a shore jaunt suddenly shipped among them, instead of a savage who not ten hours before had stood sentry over them with a loaded gun; and when they took him on board, and dressed his wounds with all the deftness of tried campaigners, they speedily discovered in him the material for modeling a man after their skipper's own heart—one of them, one with them.

Saunders and Carter sat until late in the night talking over plans, for what had appeared to be simply a straightforward piece of hardihood promised to develop snags before the expedition was well started. The discussion was brought to an abrupt conclusion by the softly spoken report of the deck watch that a vessel was coming into the roadstead. Skipper and mate appeared on deck, peering into the dim night, and in between the schooner and the landing crept a stubby little steamboat, her windlass roaring rustily as the anchor was let go.

"Looks like that nosey little half-baked patrol the Germans keep about their share of the coast," remarked Tod Carter. "Ain't been annoyin' nobody, have y', cap'n?"

Saunders laughed joyously. Old Carter was always in a state of pessimistic foreboding until trouble started. Then there never was such an unquenchable optimist.

"Take a couple of the boys and give our

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own windlass a jangle," Saunders told him. "Soon see if he's after us. You always imagine things, Tod. It's your only fault."

Carter went forward grumbling, and soon the schooner's windlass began to *clank-clank* as the chain was snatched in. And the steam that had begun to roar at the steamer's steam-pipe stopped suddenly, a light flashed along her decks and passed forward, while throaty orders set the rusty windlass to groaning again.

"That'll do!" Saunders snapped. " 'Vast heaving, Tod. The bloomin' steamboat doesn't want to lose us. Better turn in."

Carter came aft, setting a double watch as he did so, and, with a parting, baleful glare over at the obtrusive steamer, followed the skipper below, muttering by way of good-night:

"I bet y've been up to some o' yer gaudy tricks again! Never could keep them big hands off a fat Dutchman, could ye?"

CHAPTER III

MURDER!

IN THE early morning the people on board the scrubby little steamer were astir, and boats passed to and from shore continually until late breakfast-time. The experiment of the night had convinced Saunders that his departure would be opposed, though he knew he had given no cause for such action other than his personal affront of Herr Koesch. But in a land where a trading company is permitted to rule by the government at home, a personal affront takes on grave importance sometimes, and Herr Koesch had clearly expressed his feelings toward the skipper.

"They don't seem anxious to visit us," Tod Carter growled, staring belligerently across the glassy water. "Maybe they know they got us bottled up, no wind anyhow, and no engine. I told y' years ago we ought to put a kicker into the schooner."

"Don't like the smell, Tod," smiled Saunders. "Takes up valuable space, too, and the *Pearl* asks few favors of steamboats if only a zephyr's blowing. What she lacks in that way you and the boys make up for with seamanship and clever tricks."

"Huh! You ain't got no tricks, I s'pose?" rumbled the mate, his grim, rugged face lighting for an instant with something suspiciously akin to affection.

The skipper stood at the cabin slide, thoughtfully gazing shoreward. The steamer seemed to be the last of his worries. After a brief night's sleep, he looked as fresh and well-groomed with his ruddy face and spotless drill clothes, buckskin shoes and green-lined topi, as if he were some valeted yachtsman about to pay a social call from his palatial yacht, instead of a simple trading skipper of an eighty-ton schooner facing a dilemma. Forward the new member of the crew, Jacky as he had been dubbed, stood beside the mast, glancing aft, and Saunders suddenly remembered him and called him.

The native had come on board in the night in obvious anxiety to get away, and no doubt believing that the schooner was about to sail. It occurred to the skipper that the man might suffer heavily if his shore masters discovered his whereabouts and came for him while his protector was absent, for the skipper was on the point of going ashore. He only waited to see whether the steamer's people intended to pay him a visit soon or not.

"Here, Jacky," he said.

The savage approached him with the air of a grateful dog.

"S'pose steamboat man come here, they want to take you, hey? S'pose Koesch he come, you hide, hey?"

Jacky grinned, and on such a face, naturally unprepossessing, now additionally marred and battered from his hurts, the grin was a thing of amazing effects in expression.

"I no 'fraid," he said. "S'pose come, you make magic alla same you make my gun fire me in my face. I stop. No 'fraid."

Saunders grinned in appreciation. He knew only too well that it would be utterly useless to disclaim the merit bestowed upon him. But he knew, too, the limitations of his magic, and calling Tommy, his bosun, ordered him, in the event of intrusion, to stow Jacky safely away in one of the many snug holes built in the schooner's trim shape. Warning Carter against opposing any legitimate visit, he ordered his boat away and pulled ashore.

At the beach he stood a moment scanning the outer sea. A few light clouds were rising, portending a breeze before long, and with that he had to rest content. A pompous seaman in much gold lace and many brass buttons stared offensively at him as he

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turned to go up to the village, palpably watching his movements. In sheer mischief Saunders halted, turned back to the boat, scribbled a note with many glances over his shoulder at the pompous officer, and gave it to his boat coxwain.

"Get that to Mr. Carter at once," he said aloud, "then wait here for me."

Giving no further notice to anybody about him, he strode toward the office of Koesch, bent upon forcing him to indorse his papers still further to take care of possible interference between Finschaven and the river he was bound to. Farther along the shady path there seemed to be a stir of some sort, and a buzzing of human voices drowned the drowsy hum of insects.

Just before turning into the square, which was merely a plot of level grass-grown earth surrounded by low, tin-roofed huts and palm shacks, he cast a sharp glance backward to where his schooner lay like a pretty toy at the end of a leafy vista. Her lower sails were now half hoisted, though she lay like a model in glass, so calm was the sea; but the sight of her seemed to please him hugely and he proceeded, suddenly becoming aware that the unusual stir and buzz was centered around the office of Agent Koesch.

The interior hummed with noise, the windows were full of flying insects, out across the threshold ran a stream of drying blood, already almost black. Saunders stopped, startled, suddenly realizing that if anything serious were the matter he might come in for some awkward questioning if anybody had heard of his interview with Koesch last night. As he hesitated between investigating and getting speedily out of the neighborhood, a long arm reached out from the alley beside the office, seized his sleeve and hauled him resistlessly off the path.

It was the second time within a few hours Red Saunders had been mildly surprized by unusual strength in another man. He was the less surprized, therefore, when he recognized the voice that spoke to him as that which had spoken to him just one second before he received that mighty wallop under the ear.

"Duck in here, Saunders!" the voice said, and another tug pulled him into a dark space behind a thicket fence.

Then he saw the man, and he stiffened.

"Good Lord, Venneker!" he gasped. "What's scuppered you like——"

The other laughed harshly, unpleasantly. His bronzed face bore the seams and lines of hard living; his brown eyes were shot with red streaks; and there was an air altogether about him of a good man gone a mucker through booze. And with it all he possessed an amazing physical strength which spoke eloquently of what he might have been, and must have been earlier. He kept drawing the skipper farther into the alley.

"Waste no breath on me now, old boy," he said. "It's you we have to worry about. Run, you bull-footed blighter! Down to your boat we go. Oh, blast your objections!" he swore as the skipper very naturally objected to such unceremonious handling. "I tell you to run! Come on, I say! Old Koesch has been murdered, and they're hot after you for it! Now run, you camel!"

If there was anything on earth likely to arouse the stubborn streak in Red Saunders, it was for somebody to order him to do something which he had not yet decided to do. It made no difference that Venneker happened to be about the only man living who could claim a victory over him. That victory had been won in the ring far back in their Varsity days together, when the toughest heavyweight contest in the history of Varsity boxing competitions had been won by Venneker, a seasoned veteran of his third year, over Kenneth Saunders, a freshman just up from Eton, full of confidence, strength, and possessing a modicum of skill, but lacking experience.

They had never met since that evening, and in spite of his irritation Saunders smiled reflectively as he thought of the present circumstances of their meeting. Instead of both of them, or either for that matter, holding high place in the world's affairs, as had been the right and destiny of their families' sons since the days of the Crusaders at least, here they were, meeting by sheer mischance in a German outpost of Kultur, one palpably a slipping alcoholic, the other a little trading skipper, with, touching both, a murder somewhere in the near background.

"Look here, Venneker," he said, flinging off the other's hand with a fierce gesture, "murder's an ugly word to use to me. I know nothing about Koesch's death, if he is dead, and I know nothing whatever about him or his affairs since I left him last evening at his office."

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Venneker laughed shortly, and his face underwent a vivid change of expression. Where before he had seemed to be solicitous for Saunders' safety, he appeared now possessed by some madness which knew neither reason nor argument. Again he gripped the skipper by the sleeve, and hauled at him furiously, gritting with set teeth:

"Hold the parliamentary gab-fest later! I licked you once, Saunders, and I can lick you again. I'll do it, so help me ——, if you don't get aboard your craft in two twos! Come on, you mule!"

Short of manhandling his captor, or shooting him, there was nothing the skipper could do except follow him, and with the many phases of the problem facing him he elected to do this for the time being rather than raise a fuss which might precipitate still further trouble.

Venneker suddenly halted at the fringe of the palm-sentinelled shore slope and chuckled as if greatly amused at sight of the scuffy steamboat at anchor; or, perhaps it was the sight of the *Black Pearl's* boat manned with shining-faced Islanders that aroused his mirth. He released the skipper's arm, and murmured close to his ear:

"My dear man, it is just that circumstance of your having been closeted with Koesch last evening which directs suspicion to your flaming red head. Nobody saw the Dutch blighter afterward, alive. But whistle for your boat, old chap. Let's get you aboard before Herr Captain von der Schlack ouf der Pants, or whatever his bally name is, smells you out and arrests you."

THEY boarded the schooner quickly, for the skipper had set his wits to work and had realized that anything that Venneker might have to reveal could be better said in his own cabin than in the lanes of a hostile, or at least unfriendly, village. Besides he had given Tod Carter instructions by note that left him and his little vessel holding a trump card if carried out; and he had never any doubt about Carter carrying out orders.

As they reached the schooner's deck, he noticed that the lower sails were still halfway hoisted; he also saw, glancing seaward, that the outer sea was ruffling under a crooning breeze, and even the tall palms and broad pandanus ashore rustled and nodded to the coming of the wind with noon.

"Carter!" he sang out as he stepped from the bulwarks.

The grizzled old mate looked up from his task without leaving it.

"Did you manage everything all right?" he asked.

"O' course!" grunted Tod Carter, and bent to his work again.

Nothing else seemed to be required of him, and Saunders led the way below for his companion with a smile of deepest appreciation for a good mate. As they entered the cabin-hatch, the steamboat's siren screeched a discordant signal; and presently Carter tumbled down the stairs in haste so unusual to him that Saunders stared in mild surprize.

"Steamboat's flyin' a signal to shore for the recall," he blurted out. "Boat's crew's musterin' on the beach a'ready!"

Now it was Venneker's turn to show interest, and he did so to the extent of looking absolutely frightened. Saunders noted it, too.

"All right, Tod," he said, without trace of uneasiness. "All ready to pull out?"

"All ready."

"Then get sail on her. We'll slip, and get out on this breeze. Take no notice of any signals. I'll be right up."

"Holy mackerel!" rasped Venneker, leaping to his feet and upsetting the glass of whisky the skipper had given him. "What in ——'s the good of you pulling out, you —— fool! Can you outfoot a steamer! She'll fire on you and sink you before you quit the three-mile limit! You're mad, you red-headed lunatic!"

Saunders smiled, poured more whisky for his guest, and followed Carter on deck.

"Better stay below then," he suggested as he left. "Don't want to get you mixed up in my troubles, old chap. Help yourself to the booze."

On deck he cast a swift glance ashore, and saw the steamer's boat fast filling with men. His own crew were busy about the windlass, and the sound of a hammer on a shackle-pin reached him as the fat little steamboat captain puffed down to the beach in a fine state of perspiration induced by haste, gold-lace, and warm beer.

"All ready forward?" the skipper sang out.

"All ready!"

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"Then up jib, slip the chain, and some hands aft here to the main-sheet! Lively now!"

Gracefully the little schooner's head turned toward the steamer, as if bowing farewell to her coquettishly. The sails filled with sheets close-hauled as the cable splashed into the harbor—another of the many small sacrifices Red Saunders continually made to efficiency—and a babel of shouts arose from the boat now speeding toward the steamer from the beach.

"Ready about!" called Saunders, softly, with a broad grin on his handsome face at the fat little steamer captain's frantic gesticulations. Men silently stood ready to shift over head-sheets and haul mainsheet if needed.

"Helm a-lee!"

The schooner came into the wind, her sails shook, and she paid off on the other tack, as swiftly as a yacht. Saunders glanced toward his cabin slide, and his smile broadened still more, for the non-appearance of Venneker strengthened a suspicion that had been forming in his mind. But before he had time to think very long on the subject, signals broke out from the halyards of the steamer, and even without resort to his code book he knew the message was for him—a peremptory order to stop.

None of his crew took the trouble to glance at him. They knew, none better, that when Red Saunders elected to run, it was because policy advised running, and was proof in itself that he had done nothing to be stopped for, because their beloved skipper never under any circumstances fled from a responsibility when civilized law unmistakably made him at fault. When, however, he was only wanted for something he had not done, or simply sought by some little official for a personal outwitting, he could and would run like the veriest sea hare, and always he had some trick up his sleeve for use if the chase came too fast and hot.

On the heels of the signal of flags came a more insistent summons, in the shape of a yapping one-pounder gun. The shell flew wide with the wildness of excitement, and the clatter of the steamship's windlass came clearly across the water accompanied by guttural curses in Low German. Venneker poked his head up through the skylight, flushed, red-eyed, positively repulsive of aspect.

"Can't you sail this barge!" he rasped at Saunders savagely.

The skipper spared a second to glance at him, and his earlier suspicions were strengthened. He quietly shoved the suffused face down inside, shut down the skylight, and resumed his task of taking out his little ship.

Another gunshot cracked out, and the shell screamed over the schooner's masthead. The steamer crept up to her anchor, and the hook rose dripping to her bows as she steamed slowly ahead. It seemed as if nothing short of a miracle could possibly save the little *Black Pearl* now. Still on the faces of skipper, mate, and Islander crew no sign of uneasiness was visible. On the grotesquely scarred face of Jacky, the Papuan, blind faith in miracles, even, was vividly marked as he stood like an image staring aft at the tall figure of the red-headed captain who made a man's gun kick backward.

Jacky's faith in miracles had foundation, apparently, for, seemingly without a movement on the captain's part, certainly without any overt act from the schooner, but certain as ultimate Fate nevertheless, the steamer steamed ahead, suddenly stopped, and then performed circles as wild and giddy as any intoxicated duck on a salt-wet deck, while her third shot, dispatched by a frantic hand, screamed over the village and exploded somewhere in the jungle to the huge amazement of the forest creatures.

Even old Tod Carter grinned. Saunders waved a sarcastic adieu, and as for Jacky, that pop-eyed idolator simply groveled.

CHAPTER IV

VENNEKER

THE trick he had played on the steamer was one of the oldest in the repertoire of Red Saunders. He felt a little annoyed because Venneker had, for some unknown reason, remained below while the trick was developing, and had lost the full spice of it. Jacky had not yet seen him, and that was another bit of curiosity on the skipper's part to be satisfied, for he felt mildly interested both in the reason for Venneker's brutal beating of the native, and in what would happen on either side when each saw the other.

But chiefly his chagrin was owing to the

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fact that his clever out-maneuvering of the steamer had been missed entirely by the one man whom he would have wanted to witness it. Saunders was not without a trace of pardonable vanity; and, as stated, he had once, long ago, suffered defeat at the hands of this uninquisitive Briton who coolly sat in the cabin over a whisky bottle while one of the keenest brains in the Seven Seas routed a foe without striking a blow.

Old Tod Carter had performed that same trick before, at his skipper's orders. When the schooner's sails were halfway hoisted in a flat calm, it looked to any observer simply a piece of good seamanship, drying out sails at anchor. But when the sails were used as a blind, behind which a diver's pump fed air to the grizzled old mate below on the sea-bed, busily employed shackling a stout wire hawser to the schooner's anchor, and again to the steamer's sternpost, more than simple seamanship was involved; and when, on the schooner's slipping her anchor, the steamer became anchored to the same by the wire fastened to her stern, it became a dilemma calculated to puzzle far brighter minds than those aboard the scrubby little patrol.

"Unimaginative lump!" snorted the skipper as he went below after seeing his vessel out of gunshot and the steamer still at anchor.

He was bent upon giving Venneker a sample of deep-water opinion expressed in English conceived by a brain capable of solving quadratic equations in Chinese if needed. What he saw on entering the cabin stopped at the source all his torrent of cultivated abuse.

Venneker sat at the table, slumped down in his chair, one hand clutching a whisky bottle, an empty one at his elbow, a glass rolling about to the schooner's gentle motion, and with a look on his face fit to frighten the choicest devil out of Hades.

"So it's booze, eh?" Saunders ejaculated with disgust. "No wonder you wanted to earn a few dibs beating the stuffing out of a poor —— of a savage for Koesch."

Something in the tone penetrated to Venneker's fuddled brain and he glared ferociously from under his heavy brows.

"Go t' ——!" he growled. "Like y' bally cheek, Saunders! Licked y' once—hic!—and c'n do 't 'gain. Go 'way. Shoosha!"

With the cool indifference of aim of sheer drunken idiocy he flung the empty bottle and almost with the same movement his fingers settled lovingly about the neck of the half-full one. His missile struck Saunders full in the face, but through some miracle of chance failed to break, and only blackened his two eyes; but the intent was there, and no man ever pulled off such a trick on Red Saunders without paying handsomely for the sport.

Venneker's mouth was gaping thirstily to receive the bottle neck, when Saunders sprang upon him, snatched the whisky away and hurled it through the open port, then gripped the drunken man by the shoulders and hauled him out of the chair.

"I'm going to spank you for that!" he said evenly.

Venneker leered foolishly at him, and made a weak, futile attempt to disengage his coat from that awful grip. The threat seemed rather to amuse him, however.

"Spank? Me? You spank me?" he gabbled, then brought up his fist suddenly and with perfect aim for Saunders's chin.

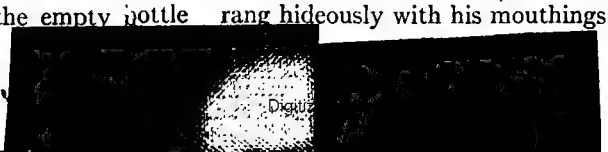
It was the instinctive punch of a veteran boxer, and it was met with the instinctive defense of a much more fit disciple of Queensbury. The skipper dropped his elbow swiftly, and the hard, bony point met Venneker's bent arm in its full upward thrust, deadening muscles and nerves for a second.

"I said spank you," he repeated, and swung the unsteady man from his feet across the table without haste, wasting no motion.

With his hard, horny hand he administered such a spanking to the fast-failing drunkard as a man has rarely received from another. He dealt the final whack upon Venneker's tightened trousers as that soused worthy subsided in a stupefied slumber, mumbling as he went off fearsome threats of what he would do to the red-headed pirate when he woke up. Saunders took him up in his arms bodily and carried him to a bunk in the tiny trade room, muttering grimly as he dumped him down:

"Poor old Alma Mater's got some queer sons, by thunder! Old Venneker's got to be pulled around. Can't see a chap go a howling mucker altogether, —— him!"

That night Venneker awoke with a raging thirst and drank off a bottle of new brandy. Dim dawn found him raving in the madness of delirium, and the schooner rang hideously with his mouthings.



With a stalwart seaman temporarily detailed to assist Tomba, the Fiji steward, Saunders let his passenger rave through the day, only taking a hand himself when the crazed man threatened to overpower both his attendants. Toward night he had Venneker brought on deck, and there drenched him with a battery of water buckets in the hands of his grinning crew. If he opened his lips to curse, a cold douche filled his gullet. If he tried to start a blundering rush, blind, bent only on destruction no matter how or to whom, a half dozen powerful discharges of brine took him in mid-career and stopped him.

"That'll do. Take him below," Saunders ordered when the tormented man tumbled headlong to the deck. "Give him a good slug of rum when he wakes, Tomba, and no more until I say so. A couple of treatments like this 'll set him up."

As Venneker was hauled through the companion slide, the figure of Jacky appeared from the fore-side of the little galley, and his wide-smiled visage was turned toward the skipper with worship shining in his black eyes. It was the first time he had seen Venneker, and though the man's roaring blasphemies had been heard throughout the ship, they were uttered in such an unrecognizable voice that Jacky had not guessed the identity of their passenger.

"Here, Jacky," the skipper called.

The Papuan responded quickly, his gaze never wavering from the smiling face of the red-haired giant, scarcely noticing, so intense was his admiration, the beautiful pair of purple-black eyes Saunders was sporting as a souvenir of Venneker's skill with the bottle.

"Jacky, you told me that man beat you because you let me get away. Tell me true, now, wasn't there something else? Why didn't he stop me himself? Why did Koesch set him to beat you instead of putting him after me?"

Jacky squirmed, trying hard to follow his inherent habit of inventing some bizarre lie rather than tell the simple truth; but he could never take his eyes away from the skipper; his child's mind could never let him forget that this same man had caused his gun to shoot backward, had put a spell on the steamer which held it to the ground in spite of raised anchor and steam, and had moreover, that very hour, handled like a baby the man who had so cruelly beaten Jacky almost to death.

He twisted his toes and licked his thick lips, struggling against the inevitable. But the skipper's smile fascinated him, and he blurted out with many a frightened glance aft:

"Herr Koesch he say fo' Venneker to catchee you when I no could stop you. He beat me firs', fo' luck he say. And when you make him stop, he know yo' voice in de dark. Den he go tell Massar Koesch he no bodder wid you, an' dey make quar'l very bad, ho yis!"

"But why?" insisted Saunders. "What has Venneker to do with Koesch? And how do you know these things, Jacky?"

"Me go to him fo' get med'cine fo' haid. He talk to dat Arab man dat try fo' knife you, sar. He talk wid Venneker too, an' say s'pose Venneker want to git cl'ar ob Finschaven widout no trouble, firs' he mus' catchee you, or bi'meby catchee jail fo' bobbery he make befo'. Den I 'yar dem talk angree, an' Venneker he say he no bodder wid you, but he lick de tar outer me fo' gibbin' him de job, so I no wait fo' med'cine, I run, an' he catchee me an' begin to beat me wid stick, oh, very hard, sar, an'——"

"And I came along and caught a wallop under the ear," smiled Saunders. "And after all, Venneker's anxiety to get away was induced by his wish to see me clear, eh? Confound the chap! And I thought he was hatching some mischief for me."

Jacky understood about three words of this. Rubbing one calloused toe against the others, he said simply—

"Yessar!" and drifted away forward to where the happy gang of seamen gathered around a huge cook-pot full of savory stew in which tinned herrings, not quite fresh, formed the chief ingredient.

"Mighty decent of him!" was the way in which the skipper summed up Venneker's action, and he began to think out modifications of the treatment he had ordered for the drunkard's madness. The cabin was quiet all that night, the sea horizon lay unbroken to the north and east, while a sweet, smart breeze and a brilliant moon made the perilous passage of the hundreds of reefs stretching straight out from the international boundary between German and British Papua a thing of only common skill and caution.

Nowhere had the steamer's smoke been

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seen yet, and the schooner was within reach of her own territorial waters once she passed those reefs inside Tobriand Island. But even a fat skipper of a fat patrol steamer might muster intelligence enough among his ship's company to seek below the surface for the thing that so strangely held him to the anchorage after his own anchor was up and his keel was obviously free; and Saunders remained on deck all night, anxiously scanning the sea astern.

THE next day passed without alarm; Venneker's wan face held the saving expression of a clearing eye after the second salt-water treatment, and a tremendous cleaning out of his system succeeding an involuntary swallowing of some pints of salt water brought him to a state of collapse which gratified the skipper, for it gave him simply a weakened system and a more or less flabby frame to build up by clean feeding and fresh air. That his patient did not lack spirit to assist the cure was evident as soon as Venneker opened his eyes after a short, swoon-like spell of unconsciousness.

"I'll whip you the day I get on my feet, Red! I did it before, and—I—can—do—it—'ga-a-ain," he muttered, and rolled over again in a deep sleep that promised to prove the turning point with his malady.

So it turned out, and when the schooner stood seaward in order to skirt the shoals of Louisiade which Saunders knew imperfectly, Venneker lounged on the skylight trying to suck comfort from his first pipe on deck. He, too, cast frequent and anxious glances astern, and at the receding shore.

"What d'you propose to do, Saunders?" he asked, lazily. "Going to chuck up the Nuanou thing?"

"Not for a minute!" exclaimed the skipper. "Whatever it was that happened in Finschaven, whether to you or to me, that set the authorities after us——"

"Speak for yourself," drawled Venneker with a short, unpleasant laugh. "I helped you get out because of what you'd done to friend Koesch."

Saunders' face darkened, and he took a quick step toward the man; then restrained himself and went on:

"Whatever it was, whoever killed Koesch, German territory isn't healthy for me around the coast, anyhow. But I'll give up nothing I've won, and that includes the right to explore territory within the German borders in the mountains. I'm going there. If you want to come, perhaps some day you'll be fit and able to give me that licking you've drooled about."

"Go up the Fly River?"

"Yes. Have to cross Holland's line going that way, but I'll chance it. The prize is worth it."

He turned his head upward as a hail came down from aloft.

"What is it, Sammy?"

"Dar's smoke a-comin' up behime, cappen. Cain't see de steamer yet."

"Stay where you are, then. Sing out soon as you make her out, my lad."

Venneker half rose from his lounge with an oath, then sank back, his pipe falling from his mouth. He peered sharply at the skipper, but Saunders appeared to have noticed nothing; and the helmsman stood like a wooden image at his wheel. Already Venneker had detected an uncanny sort of absence of all excitement or even curiosity about the crew of the *Black Pearl*. Everybody seemed to take every happening entirely as a matter of course. Nothing seemed to matter; nothing seemed to go wrong.

There was yet daylight to spare when the

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schooner headed inshore after passing the outlying dangers, and as she crept along faster with the change of course the masthead lookout called out—

"Steamer he come t'rough inside passage, sar!"

An outflung arm pointed her out, and she held such a position with regard to the schooner as to make overhauling her a mere matter of time. Saunders peered intently at her, and then took his long telescope and scanned the waters ahead. As far as he could see now, the coast and its islets were possessions of the power whose flag he flew when he flew any. If only he could win into sight of a port or town, or even pick up the smoke of a steamer flying that flag, he would snap his fingers at the scrubby little ship coming along after him.

One or two things had come to his notice while Venneker was uproarious that set him deeply thinking about Koesch and Finschaven, little though he wanted to think of either. He was by no means sure whether in taking Venneker away he had done something he should not have done.

"He's one of my own kind, anyhow. Let the Dutchman get him if he can," he muttered.

Venneker sat on the after gratings staring hard at the distant steamer. Carter was below at supper, and the crew were at theirs in the forecastle, except the helmsman and the lookout aloft. Red stepped down from the little half-poop to the main-deck meaning to get out the lead-line in preparation for approaching the coast, for he showed always that consideration for his men which had resulted in their blind worship of him.

He got the line and halted beside the main-hatch while he shook out the coils. A rasping sound behind him made him turn, but not quickly enough; for a figure rose through the uncovered corner of the hatchway, a figure with a dark face split across with a cruel gash of a mouth, and, while the skipper's hands were still involved in the line, struck at his back twice with a c ooked blade.

Saunders pitched forward onto his hands and knees, and the man darted aft and on to the rail while Venneker glared at him aghast. It was the lookout's shout that brought mate and crew on deck with a run, and Tod Carter glared once into the convulsed face of the speechless Venneker, followed his gaze to the dot on the water which was a swimming head going at speed toward the steamer, then snatched a gun from the deck-house companion and began to pump bullets at the swimmer.

Men picked up the skipper and bore him tenderly aft; but he was not dead by any means; he bled freely, but there was still a ghost of a grin on his face as he heard old Tod cursing his rifle, the poppling sea, the rotten ammunition—everything but his own agitated aim.

"Set me down here, boys," the skipper gasped. "I'm good for ten dead 'uns yet. He struck my shoulder-blade, and thank the luck they're tough. Where's Venneker?"

As the words left his lips, Carter ceased firing and all hands turned to the starboard side at the sound of a heavy splash.

"By Godfrey, Venneker's gone after 'im!" exclaimed Carter, setting down his hot rifle and mopping his face. "Good f r 'im!"

"He no go fo' dat fella," yelled Jacky, pointing frenziedly.

The Arab was heading direct for the steamer, now within a mile of the schooner: Venneker was heading at his best speed for the nearest shore. They told the skipper, and he shook his head worriedly.

"Let him go," he said, dryly. "Carry on, Tod. You're inside the three-mile limit, and if the German bothers you put in at Mullins Bay. If he gives up, carry on to Moresby. Now roll me over and clap a bandage on this knife hole."

"Beats me what that chap lit out for!" growled Carter, coming back from the cabin with lint, bandages and antiseptic.

He examined the two broad gashes which laid bare the bones, and shook his grizzled old head.

"Beats me!" he muttered again. "Skipper, ain't it a wonder anybody else ever has any luck? —— if you ain't got enough for the crowd. Any other lad 'd ha' been carved clean in two pieces by them slashes, by James!"

Jacky hovered near by, pained beyond expression, but seeing in the skipper's lucky escape from death still another piece of evidence of his magical powers.

"I t'ink dem mans 'fraid de debbil lib inside ob you, massar!" he grinned, when Saunders met his eye and slowly winked at him.

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"He does, Jacky. That's true. Don't ever forget to tell all mans you meet that I catchee one big fella devil alla same."

A distant report seemed to snarl at his humor. The German had fired a parting shot in chagrin as the schooner crossed the line.

CHAPTER V

ASTROLABE BAY

A TALL, blond white man hobbled on crutches up and down a long veranda facing the sea, and the dim, cool house behind him was murmurous with subdued voices trembling with fear. Every minute or so the crippled man would thump the floor with one of his crutches, brandish the other furiously and curse something or somebody as yet unseen with blood-chilling oaths. Then the gliding forms in the dim interior would scatter like mice and hide until the outburst ceased and the steady thump of the crutches announced the resumption of their master's lonely promenade.

Herman Neuman was fast recovering from the injuries sustained in the tussle with Red Saunders for that lease of problematical worth high up in the savage hinterland, but not by any means fast enough for his impatient temper. As he glared out over the sea his face writhed with passion; at the rare moments when the Agent visited him, or sent a visitor of his race to enliven the tedious hours with guttural chat, he could wear a smile, but it was as a man might wear a strange hat, to be flung aside the instant the visitor departed.

And he had waited in Astrolabe Bay already longer than he desired. All his outward good sportsmanship up in the mountains had been the camouflage of his race. Availing himself of the good services of his successful opponent, to get down to the nearest place where attention might be secured, he had, immediately the *Black Pearl* sailed, set to work sundry agencies to the end that Red Saunders might not only never enjoy the fruits of his clean victory and ensuing purchase, but should never quit German waters scot free.

But the messenger from Finschaven was tardy, the Agent at Astrolabe Bay was dull, and Herman Neuman forgot that the man he proposed to injure had already whipped him once, fairly and in good old Anglo-Saxon fashion, and might reasonably be expected to repeat the operation.

"Boy!" he yelled at last.

The evening sun was leaving a sea as flat and as speckless as the blue sky overhead. A shivering savage answered his call.

"Tell Herr Dunckelman to come to me. Get me also a messenger, and a canoe with six rowers. Haste, pig!"

His order was emphasized by a blow of a crutch which almost split the skull of the unlucky Papuan.

Neuman's harsh voice, shorn of all pretense to culture, resounded through the settlement, and the Agent appeared promptly, puffing, sweating, angry as a hornet, yet holding in his weak eyes an expression of enforced respect for the unruly invalid who had taken charge of his only guest house and preempted all claim upon nine-tenths of the official domestic staff.

"Look here, my good friend, this can not any more be!" he cried as he confronted Neuman.

He spoke in German, and quivered like a jelly as he spoke in rising voice. Neuman regarded him superciliously.

"Silence!" was the curt, snappy retort. "You will please to remember that my father controls the company, Herr Dunckelman, and bear it in mind when you speak to me."

The Agent subsided a little, and looked more jelly-like than ever, but his little weak eyes nevertheless retained a spark of indignation, his fat round cheeks were still puffed out with the ghost of his official importance.

"I shall not forget, Herr Neuman. Nor shall you forget that I am officially in charge of this our settlement. What is it that you want? Everything at my disposal I have given to you. My messengers have not yet arrived. Please to resign yourself to patience, and believe that I shall at once communicate with you when news arrives. You will injure your leg, retard your recovery, put yourself in a dangerous fever by this impatience."

For answer Neuman hurled a crutch at the Agent's head, and fell into a chair from sheer passionate weakness.

"—— old idiot!" he roared gaspingly; "speak to me no more of what may be or is to be. Send more messengers, by ——, or I have your official scalp to carry home to Bremen!"

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"Scalps for Bremen may be of two colors!" yelled the Agent in a frenzy of indignation, rubbing his bruised head. "I too may report of a lease issued to Herr Neuman, which he, without cause, sold to an alien——"

Neuman tried to rise, urged by fury, spurred by the memory of that terrific combat up in the mountains. Murder was nearest of all the impulses to the surface then, and the Agent's life was as little worth as that of Herr Koesch, already dead. But the crippled leg gave way, Neuman toppled over, and expended his rage in futile attempts to get up unassisted.

"Permit me, Herr Neuman," murmured Dunckelman through clenched teeth, and helped the invalid to his chair again.

For half an hour he paced the veranda, uneasy at his guest's long silence. But there was nothing he could do, except wait. He, too, was anxious about the expected messenger from Finschaven. Together he and Neuman had hatched a pretty plot to entrap the red-headed skipper, and there were other fish quite likely to be caught, according to latest reports from Koesch. But no word came through, though a message had long since been received saying that not only had Saunders and his schooner arrived, but also that other, wastrel Englishman, Robert Venneker, who was badly wanted by every German agent in Papua. After the bare notice of arrival, no news was to hand concerning either of them. When Dunckelman's patience was all but exhausted, a frightened native ran along the veranda, kow-towed low to the Agent, and groveled before Neuman's deck chair.

"I am messenger, sar," he said. "Sea canoe he with six mans waiting, oh lord."

Neuman struggled to his feet, or rather to his one good foot, snatching the crutch the Agent offered him as a hungry man might snatch at a meaty bone.

"Here, give me your arm, Dunckelman!" he snarled. "Boy! your arm."

Laboriously they bore him down to the beach and sat him, cursing, on the heaped-up sand beside a big canoe, for even as they reached the shore a long canoe with a square mat sail came flying around the eastern point.

"Wait! It is the boat from Koesch," cried Dunckelman jubilantly running to the water's edge.

THE canoe sped in on the crest of a smooth roller, and slid gently up the sand to the pull of a half dozen sturdy arms. Fumbling at his grass girdle, a squash-nosed, villainous-looking cannibal Papuan confronted the Agent, scowling like a fiend, utterly ignoring Neuman for all that fuming worthy's harsh commands to deliver his message.

Dunckelman snatched at the twist of paper handed to him by the savage messenger, and read it in feverish haste, while the Papuan and Neuman tried to out-stare each other, the black man with a renewed appetite for long pig, the Teuton boiling with impotent wrath at the manner in which a dirty native ignored him, one of the Lords of Earth.

"*Gott im Himmel!*" wailed the Agent.

His little blue eyes behind their huge glasses glared down at Neuman in dismay. His nervous fingers twisted again the paper he had but hurriedly smoothed out to read. His fish-like mouth remained open idiotically, and Neuman, already at explosion point, exploded:

"Swine, and son of a swine! Father of swine and husband to a sow! Speak, or give to me that paper!"

Dunckelman stared woodenly. He looked foolishly down at the scrap of paper in his destroying fingers, then glanced upward again to meet Neuman's eye with a terrified look in his own. He shut his mouth like a weak-springed trap, then opened it again slowly to utter:

"The *Black Pearl* went to sea in the face of our patrol. Captain Saunders went too, in defiance of our authority. The swine Venneker also went. Koesch's messenger went, none knows where. The Agency Arab *intelligencer*, set to keep watch on Saunders, failed ashore and was carried away to sea with him, and—and—Herr Neuman, Agent Koesch is dead, murdered!"

"What!" yelled Neuman, leaping to his feet.

His healing leg snapped again, and he fell like a polled ox, groaning in agony while Dunckelman recited monotonously the end of his doleful tale.

"The swine of an Englisher is said to have the magic. A native reported that the red-headed tough made our guard's gun shoot backward; everybody in Finschaven saw how, without doing anything himself, he caused our steamer to remain fastened to

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the bottom while yet she floated freely. The steamer did not get clear until the next day, when she suddenly sprang forward, therefore proving that trickery had been worked upon our good captain. Now they at Finschaven wait for news from her. She has steamed in pursuit of the red pig Saunders."

"May crabs with sixty-nine claws each fasten to your guts!" groaned Neuman weakly. "Take me to the house, chattering fool! You have killed me with your empty clacking."

Neuman's leg healed finally in three months, and when able to hobble about sufficiently to get into a litter and out of it on a march, he set to work to gather a force of trained natives, who, armed adequately, would ensure his successful penetration to the ground he had held before leasing it to Saunders, and, once there with such a force, which he lacked before, he would not only hold it against any attempt to oust him, but would surely prosecute his quest of old King Nuanou's storied treasures which had been the impelling motive when he wheedled from the Company that seemingly barren concession in the wildest, most savage part of Papua.

There was another force, too, urging him on; the fierce hope that he might catch the red-headed skipper off guard when he met him and exact payment for his previous humiliation and present incapacity.

The party was ready at last, only waiting for the monthly steamer to call with stores. Astrolabe Bay could spare little, certainly not enough to carry such an expedition into the hinterland for a period of several months. Then, coming up from Finschaven, with only Kaiser Wilhelm Haven to call at afterward, Neuman set in motion the dark machinery of influence and commandeered most of the stores intended for the last port of call, and fitted out his party luxuriously.

As he was about to start out, the steamer's purser brought up the mail and in it was a piece of intelligence which, totally contradicting other, earlier, news, sent Neuman and Dunckelman into a raging fury of passion that all but precipitated dire diaster.

"You told me—" roared Neuman.

"I told you," the Agent roared back angrily, "that which I had heard. Herr Neuman, you provoke me beyond endurance with your overbearing manner, and I shall not stand it longer."

"Fat swine!" Neuman hissed viciously, thrusting his convulsed face close to the Agent's; "for what are you here? Is it not for service? Then for what reason, or lack of reason better, did you tell me first that Red Saunders had escaped, and again that Koesch's Arab had killed him? After all you told me you knew the red-headed ruffian was not killed——"

"I told you news as it came to me," sputtered Dunckelman helplessly. "Am I to be blamed because no news comes from Finschaven for three months, even though the steamer calls? Can I see beyond the mountains and tell you the —— Englisher——"

"You tell me now that even our steam patrol could not prevent him reaching his Territorial waters, by ——! You tell me that a man stabbed twice by such an arm as the Arab's is not only alive and safe with all his gang, but is already setting out by a better route than mine to steal my——"

"*Ach!*" roared Dunckelman in frenzy. "You told me you sold to him the lease! Stop! I will not listen, by *Himmel!*"

He ran from Neuman like a fat little boy, rumpling his straw-colored hair frantically, puffing painfully in the effort to get clear away and the insistent fear that he would presently feel the sharp pain of grievous bodily hurt. But Neuman let him go with a curse, and added ten men to his party before setting out in long canoes for the Kaiserin Augusta river.

CHAPTER VI

POWERFUL MEDICINE

RED SAUNDERS and his little ship's company lay in snug seclusion at Mullens Harbor until his troublesome wounds showed signs of healing. To have gone direct to Port Moresby might have resulted in a quicker recovery, but it would also have resulted in certain inquiries, which might have brought unpleasant consequences. Where, besides an unfathomable native element, or rather a hundred unfathomable native elements, there exist in one island three definite and sharply contrasted colonizing governments, there are quite likely to be prying eyes and whispering tongues in the chief town of either part of the divided territory.

So Tod Carter played nurse and surgeon,

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aided tremendously by Jacky, who renewed acquaintances ashore and produced marvelous native remedies for terrible wounds, obtained by threat from his secretive tribesmen. Besides, he obtained luscious fruit, a boon to the big stricken skipper whose blood, fevered in spite of medicine chest and unwearying care from all hands, filled him with a yearning for cooling juices.

Gradually the wounds healed, and Saunders grew restless with inaction. Nothing had been seen or heard of the German steamer, nor of Venneker; nobody could even guess at the motive which urged Venneker to plunge overboard and swim to an apparently impenetrable jungle shore, particularly since the would-be murderer of Saunders was already bound as fast as arms and legs could thrust him toward the pursuing steamer.

"It can hardly have been funk," the skipper remarked after old Tod Carter had finished dressing his fast-healing wounds and advanced the theory that Venneker's sudden abstention from liquor had given him the jumps and robbed him of his undoubted courage.

"Huh!" grunted Tod. "P'raps not. All the same, skipper, he was plenty swift in beatin' the oakum out o' Jacky with a blasted big stick, wasn't he? Then didn't he hand you a corker of a smash in the jaw when you butted in? Shows he had guts as well as a —— bad temper, don't it? It's about the only time since I been wi' you, as any man ever walloped you for a goal and never got paid for it. So if he ain't lost all his pluck and turned skunk wi' fright, why ain't he come down to give us a hail? No, sir!" he continued. "Too much booze is bad, and too little, or none at all, 's a —— sight wuss. Sp'iled a promisin' scrap, cuttin' his booze off did. I was sort o' lookin' for'ard to the day when him and you tangled up for a reckonin'. Hoped 't was goin' to be as good as that time in Palembang, when you and Ruby Beauchamp went to it."

Saunders smiled painfully, yet with some of his old-time geniality and all of his ineradicable humor.

"You'll see proof that you're wrong, and your greedy old eyes shall gloat on that reckoning at the same moment some time, Tod. I have no doubt at all but that we shall see Venneker again, and soon. There's a suspicion lurking back of my head, and I go large on such hunches. I'd be glad to find it was unfounded. Why? Lord, man, didn't I tell you Venneker was the first and only man to whip me in a fair, upstanding contest?"

"Sure you told me," growled Tod, dubiously, "but since when ha' you took a deep and lovin' fancy to men as licks yuh? Seems to me most men as even says boo to yuh has to go through the bloomin' 'oop. And here y' are, sorry for Venneker, as a'most killed Jacky."

"Some day, when it's you instead of me lying helpless for a spell, I shall sit beside you, Tod, as you have sat beside me this month past, and I shall explain to you how a man may hold even the man who slams seven-bells out of him in respect under certain conditions. I shall wait until such a time, because at no other time will you or I have time for the thing to be made clear. I reverence every grizzled hair of that stubborn old head of yours, Tod, and to save it from harm I'd chance some of my own sunny curls, but as a head, a thinking head, it's about as ready to receive impressions as the lower mainsheet block. There now! Run away——"

Saunders reached up, seized Tod's hair and rumpled it, and the old mate leaped up, cursing amazingly, his leathery face almost mahogany colored with embarrassment, but with a light in his eyes that most men would give half their lifetime to see once in any man turned toward them.

"You're well!" he roared. "Ain't no more the matter wi' you than there is wi' Jacky's appetite. Better be movin', afore yuh starts gettin' me mad. I ain't no gal, nor no flossy haired boy, by Jumpin' Jupiter!"

Saunders got up slowly, grinning hugely. He tried every muscle and limb, stretched his broad shoulders tenderly, and winced at the twinge that shot through his scarred back. Then, as a last test, he seized a backstay and swarmed a little way up it, using his hands alone. At ten feet he stopped and slid down, wearing a smile of satisfaction.

"Hoist in the boat!" he ordered. "Carter! Unshackle the mooring swivel and single up the chains. We'll run up to Port Moresby on the flood tide."

In Moresby the schooner took in stores to replace those used up during her lengthy stay in Mullens. Deciding upon an entirely different route from that first intended also

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brought fresh needs, and among these last was the desirability of getting into intimate and friendly touch with somebody having influence in the Dutch part of the island, for, by following the Fly river, the course would cross in turn British, Dutch, and German boundaries, and jealousy was a strong factor in the mutual relations of the three governments.

To the representative of his own country Saunders repaired first of all, asking for a passport to an indefinite place by an undefined route on a very much unexplained errand.

"Oh, I say Saunders, old chap, I can't do anything like that, you know!" the gentleman exclaimed petulantly. "Why, confound it, man, even now the wires are hot between Finschaven and Bremen demanding your bally scalp, don't you know. What in the world do you want here, anyhow? You simply drift around the islands, setting people by the ears, starting rumpuses which you leave others to finish, and——"

"Dear old bean, don't spare me," the skipper laughed good-naturedly. "What I ask of you is a bit of paper and a scratch of a pen. —— your eyes, my pater was a parson, a blooming bishop, in fact, and I know every sermon he ever preached by heart. Used to buy 'em a tanner a dozen or something like that, and many a gross I bagged to make tails for kites. That's where any sermon you may preach me goes—right over my head, old thing. Now how about that little note?"

"I can't do it, I can't really!" cried the harassed official. "I ought to hold you as it is, and put a plaster on your blessed mainmast, too, if I did what I——"

"All right, old Top, I'll get along without it," laughed the skipper, thrusting out his hand in friendliness. "I'll avoid treading upon your dear little corns while I'm here, and if you'll do me the honor of dining with me aboard the *Black Pearl* tonight——"

"Go to the ——!" rapped the official sharply, afraid he was only another subject for the notorious free-lance's famous humor.

Saunders left with a jaunty step and a face suffused with a broad grin; but as he walked ahead on a straight line as if with a definite object in view he pondered upon his next step and only hoped he might arrive at some decision before the sheer restrictions of the place's size forced him to reveal his uncertainty by turning aimlessly aside from his course.

AS ON many another occasion, his implicit faith in his good fortune was justified. As he approached the end of a narrow lane, and reached the last low-thatched bungalow before the encroaching jungle stopped up the pathway, he was halted suddenly by the hideous ravings of a man in deadly fear and excruciating torment. There was a murmuring, too, and occasionally a yell with a thud of falling, as if somebody hurled something heavy at somebody else and that that somebody else was definitely and plentifully hit.

Entering on an impulse, the skipper stopped abruptly in the utter darkness of a shaded and screened interior. The noise, however, was by way of being a continuous performance, and through the hurricane of blazing oaths that greeted his entrance he detected the welcome characteristics of the Holland tongue, though the voice hurled deep-sea blasphemies broadcast in fair English.

He approached the low camp-bed, and a swarm of natives drew aside, seeing many details of his appearance where he, coming out of the light into the gloom, saw only vague shapes. He drew out his pocket torch, which he carried with him as regularly as he carried his pocket automatic, and flashed a ray of light upon the sufferer.

"Holy sailor!" he gasped, and with reason.

A huge frame of a man lay face downward, clutching the bed with his hands, quivering out of absolute anguish. The wasted body, the tremendous frame, the nervous clutch of the great hands, all told of a giant among men arrived at his last extremity. Indifferent to the terrifying oaths yelled at him, Saunders stooped to examine what at first he refused to believe could be, but which he saw, only too clearly in the torch-light, was a real and unmistakable horror.

The back of the man's right thigh over a space the size of a man's palm was eaten away to the bone, and ends of sinews and purple shreds of flesh fringed the edges of the great ulcer. In a bowl beside the cot some herbs were steaming in hot water; a withered old hag crouched whimpering in a corner, rag in hand, where she had apparently been hurled by some spasm of the

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tormented man; a grotesquely painted and feathered ancient of the other sex intoned a low, monotonous rigmarole to the devil of that particular sort of sickness, commanding him to leave the white boss immediately or go forever short of chicken bones and baby's heads.

A deep muttering passed around as one by one the natives got a glimpse of Saunders's face, and recognized therein the terrible man of the black schooner, whom Jacky had lost no time in providing with an outrageously lurid reputation as a fighter, a friend, and a worker of real magic. The sick man heard the muttering, and without looking up howled to Saunders to get out. He'd heard all about him. Red seized a couple of natives, and urged them outside.

"Here, Johnny, what fashion fire you make it?" he demanded.

The man showed him an Anglo-Persian Company's kerosene stove which already had a boiler of steaming water on it.

"Make fire, wood fire, quick!" he ordered, and walked away on a tour of inspection. In the out-house kitchen he found an old rifle-barrel, rusted beyond all hope of future use as a firearm. He took it to the fire, already blazing merrily, and thrust it into the heart of the heap. Then, seeking further, he found the hut used as a store-room, and from it took a couple of stout box lashings and some straps. With his find he reentered the hut and went straight to the bed.

"Here!" he snapped. The natives came running. Their black, unhandsome faces were clouded with mingled fear and awe of the red-headed magic worker. They obeyed him unquestioningly. He spoke to the sick man, received a particularly splitting curse in response, and said simply:

"I'm Saunders. I'll cure you. Better take hold of the bed in your teeth."

And before another retort could be uttered he seized the patient in his own strong arms, threw his weight upon him, and bade the natives:

"Tie him! Ropes, Johnny! Strap, Mary! quick, blast you!"

Like a frantic tiger enmeshed in grass ropes the Dutchman fought. Only a man such as Saunders could have held him, and that only with the advantage of the first unexpected attack. One rope and a strap were passed clumsily, but sufficiently to hold, and then the skipper himself took charge of the lashing, and the man lay still, his breath spent in cursing, his horrible sore sapping the strength from him.

Then the skipper went out and brought in the rifle barrel, red-hot and sizzling. A wad of wet grass protected his own hands, but there was nothing to protect his patient. Coolly, without a tremor, Saunders applied the red-hot iron to the wound, and worked it about until he had burned every minutest part of the great ulcer.

The cot groaned and tottered under the agonized struggles of the helpless man; the hut rang with yells such as rarely issued from a human throat; with one strong hand upon the man's shoulders, soothingly patting him, and the other remorselessly pressing the red-hot iron into the cringing flesh, the skipper carried on until the nasty job was finished.

"There!" he cried, flinging the rifle barrel out of the doorway. "Nobody out of a big hospital could have cured it before. It's only a burn now. You can cure a burn, Mary, hey? Savvee, burn? Leaves? Hey?"

"A'right," the old hag mumbled, and came forward with her pot of balsamic herbs again. Saunders saw her apply a big, healing poultice to the tremendous burn, and nodded his head approvingly.

"I come tomorrow and see again," he said. "Make plenty good lookout, Mary, and bimeby you catch plenty red calico, see?"

Mary saw, apparently, and Saunders departed for his schooner feeling that he had done a good day's work after all. For, in searching the store hut for ropes and straps, he had come upon labels which tagged his Hollander patient as one who might very easily prove useful on his expedition, if only in a very unofficial way.

To complete his satisfaction, Jacky came on board late that night and burst into his cabin without ceremony.

"Massar, I catch ol' chief fo' frien' fo' you!" he yelled excitedly. "S'pose you make big magic fo' him, he gib you stick fo' take you t'rough much country ob bad mans."

"Oh, forget the magic, you donkey!" growled the skipper ungraciously.

"No forget, sar," grinned Jacky. "I hear about de Dutchman!" and he slipped away chuckling.

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CHAPTER VII

JACKY'S FRIEND

ACKY'S friend materialized early in the morning in the shape of a repulsive old vage, wrinkled, slack-lipped, hideously arred, and frizzy of hair, naked as the wn except for a grass girdle and a wide ebbing belt like that used in slinging mels on board ship. He wore, too, a ondrous coat of filth, but that, coming om Nature, scarcely merits the appela- on of garment.

With him came two surly, stalwart, spear- rmed savages, a bodyguard for his ancient gliness; and a plump young woman, full- hested and broad-hipped, who had ob- iously recently taken up the burden of earing the chief's offspring in the place of he withered, age-dried hag with flat reasts who accompanied her as a slave.

Papuan wives are slaves anyhow, bought, reated, and discarded as such, and the only ifference in their condition is that one such s the young woman might be worth a undred pigs, while the juiceless old crone ould be dear at one small, sickly piglet, nd each was regarded as property and alued accordingly.

They took charge of the schooner's spot- ss decks, much to Tod Carter's expressed isgust, and were there served at the skip- er's order with tinned kippers, hard-tack, nd rancid butter, to the inexpressible rath of Tomba, the Fiji steward, who fed hem.

Obviously much was expected of Saun- lers. The old chief glanced at him fre- uently while gorging himself with food, nd he was clearly disappointed in the big ed-headed sailor. The two young stal- arts made no effort to conceal their con- empt, while the young woman giggled penly, daring the anger of her ancient lord n order to show that she deemed Jacky a iar.

Jacky hung in the background, making xpressive gestures intended to urge pa- ience, until Saunders, a bit irritable at ength, went below and called Jacky after im.

"What fashion, Jacky?" he demanded, shaking the Papuan sharply. "What kind making all so black looking? What you bin tell um, hey?"

"Dey look fo' big magic, sar," grinned Jacky, his teeth chattering. "I tell 'em you mos' big white witch ebber lib'. I go tell 'em go home now."

"Go home!" growled the skipper, releasing Jacky and gazing at him in doubt. "Do nothing of the sort. You said this old man could help me, and he must do it."

"He no help no white man, sar, 'cept he make magic for frighten him."

Saunders cursed the man's stupidity. None knew better than the big sailor himself how flimsy a claim he had to magic powers. He was puzzled. He badly needed all the good will to be had among the fierce natives of the interior, and if it were only to be bought by magic, why, magic he must produce. But how?

"See here, Jacky," he said at last, inspiration coming to him with the recollection that somewhere among his trade gear was a motion-picture machine and camera of doubtful though possible value. "See here, boy. You go make talk, see? Tell Tomba to feed 'em plenty more grub. Keep 'em where they are. You tell 'em I make very big magic just in the old chief's honor, but no can do no more like this. Only make real magic when proper time comes, see? You tell 'em."

Jacky was off like a shot, and his voice was raised importantly, first ordering Tomba to produce more food, then telling such a lurid tale of what was coming that Saunders almost choked with mirth and the savages were on the point of bolting ashore, so frightful a picture did Jacky paint. But more flavorsome food and a dishpan full of strong gin-and-water overcame their fears, and by the time Saunders had taken a reel of film from behind the after house, unseen to his guests, the old chief was not only entirely at ease in himself, but had begun once more to regard Saunders' magic as a myth.

The two bodyguards muttered their unbelief unceasingly. The skipper slipped below with his machine, locked it in the trade room, and rummaged among some broken boxes until he found a part of a parcel of toys, put on board months before when he started up the mountains first. He selected a green-painted wooden jumping frog, and a big Chinese zig-zag firecracker. With these he went on deck, puffing clouds of smoke from a big cigar.

His guests greeted him with a stare of plain accusation. Jacky seemed nervous; and perhaps the palpable ill-temper of the

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old chief and Jacky's nervousness sprang from the same root. Saunders loitered beside one of the young bucks, puffing away at his cigar, and announced with a great air of boredom:

"Magic no come now. Too much light. Tonight I show you big magic——"

The savage beside him uttered something in Papuan which in its very tone was an insult.

"What did he say?" demanded Saunders of Jacky, sharply.

The offender glowered at him belligerently.

"Him say," Jacky translated, "too much dark tonight for yo' kin' ob magic."

Jacky grinned sheepishly, for his idolized skipper certainly seemed at a loss. Saunders smiled cheerfully into the scowling face of his challenger, and with one big hand half-cupped took the cigar from his lips and stepped close to the savage.

"Some time not good for magic, some time proper. This time no proper, only for bad fella," he said, and suddenly darted his hand into the man's woolly hair, tugged until the man howled and raised his spear, then dashed upon the deck at the man's feet a fat, heavy green frog which was surely possessed by a devil of devils. First the frog jumped upon the man's naked feet, and fire and smoke issued from its horrible mouth with a terrible sound.

The savage yelled, dropped his spear, and leaped over the rail in a flying bound. His brother in arms waited but to hear once more the awful voice of the devil frog, then, as its second hop brought it over to his own naked feet, he too sprang clear over the rail into the sea while the old chief and his women crept down trembling to their canoe. Jacky's eyes were like saucers.

It required the stout arms of Tod Carter to prevent him following the frightened savages.

"Tell the chief," ordered Saunders in a stern voice, "to be on the shore abreast of here tonight one hour before the moon first comes out of the jungle. Tell him he must obey, or evil spirits will come and get him. He has flouted my magic after demanding it be shown to him. I shall show him, and his people, my power. At the hour before the moon they shall come on to my ship in spirit, though their bodies shall stay on shore. They shall sit there in fear and trembling, looking at themselves making feast with me here. I have spoken!"

Jacky was impressed. He delivered the command with suitable emphasis, and the chief went ashore shivering with fright yet in no mood to risk disaster by disobeying. Saunders spent a hot afternoon in an improvised dark room below, stripped to the skin, sweating in streams, yet chuckling happily. At supper time he emerged, wearing a smile of triumph, and appeared bathed and dressed, cool and clean as ever for the evening meal.

"Got a little job for you, Carter," he said, as they ate wild oranges and luscious pineapples sent aboard that noon by the sick Hollander.

The little gift was proof enough that the skipper's heroic remedy had begun to show results for the better.

"Huh!" grunted the mate, noncommitally. "Want me to fill my pockets with gunpowder an' play I'm a ruddy great firefly, I s'pose?"

"Not quite," the skipper smiled. "Just have a kedge carried out astern so we won't swing from the position we're lying in now. Then about dark hoist the mainsail, peak it up all you can, and then haul the boom down as flat as possible and guy it out to the starboard rigging. I want it to stand flat as a board, and face shoreward.

"Don't do it, though, until after sundown," he cautioned. "And, by the way, old fellow, it won't hurt if you keep Jacky in the dark about our little tricks a bit longer. I've got a feeling we shall get along better in this ungodly island by a little bit of faking than by any amount of influence or gunpowder. Let him see the show, if you like, but keep him away from anywhere where he's likely to see me working the hookum, see?"

"Might see better if I knew the bloomin' 'ookum meself!" growled Tod.

The skipper laughed quietly.

"Giving you all a little movie show, that's all, Tod," he said, and went up to prepare a stage on which to operate the projector. He built it out over the port quarter of the schooner, where he could crouch with his machine out of sight of anybody on shore, and only visible to those on board if they came up to the little half-poop. Jacky could easily be induced to stay by the shoreward, or opposite rail, simply by bidding him witness for himself how his master would confound the unbeliever.

As for Jacky's own feelings, they were

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beyond description, for the fiery frog put the capital on the edifice of wonders worked by this strange red-headed sailor, and, whatever suspicion might once have found place in Jacky's frizzy head, all had gone now, vanished with the sparks and fiery breath of the fat green jumping frog. The marvel might have been explained had it simply appeared out of the skipper's hand; but was it not true that the awful thing was taken from the hair of the greatest unbeliever of them all?

Jacky frenziedly scratched his own raven mop and crept to his supper with only half his usual appetite and none of his customary uproarious joviality.

DARKNESS fell on a breathless evening, fit indeed for magic demonstrations. The schooner's graceful black hull lay in a motionless shadow, parallel with the shore; her great mainsail rose from boom to gaff in an unbroken, wrinkleless sheet of ghostly white. Ashore black shapes crouched in trembling uneasiness, yet too frightened to disobey orders and run away.

Promptly upon the threatened hour a great white eye grew out of the blackness surrounding the schooner, an eye that spread and opened and winked until it seemed to fill the sky. Jacky stood beside the rail, within twenty feet of the mainmast, lightly but purposefully held by Tommy, the Island bosun.

Then upon the screen appeared a blur, vague, misty, but growing, ever growing until the old chief, his women, and the bodyguard stood out plainly for all to see and recognize. Thus the picture stood while one might count ten. Then, wonder of wonders, the figures began to move! To eat! To open their mouths and stuff fish and biscuit into them, to drink gin and to open and shut their eyes! Jacky stood spellbound—until he saw himself walk into the group and speak to the ancient chief.

It was too much. With a howl, strangely echoed, it seemed from shore, he broke loose from Tommy and plunged headlong down to the forecastle where he crept under a lower bunk and wrapped his head in an old biscuit sack.

A little longer the vision remained, and Tomba came into it carrying more food, more gin and water, and then, gradually, like a mist that is vanquished by the morning sun, the vision faded into the blackness of night again, and the skies were bare and silent.

"Get the mains'l down lively, lads," ordered Saunders, coming over the rail with his machine. "Where's Jacky?"

"He go for hide hisself," grinned Tommy, slacking away the peak halyards.

"Get him," said the skipper, and passed below to stow away his magic machine.

Jacky had to be dragged aft. His eyes stood out like a crab's eyes as he faced the skipper.

"Here, swig off on this, sonny," said the skipper, handing the trembling savage a tumbler full of rum. The liquor seemed to instil a little pluck into Jacky when he had almost strangled himself getting it down too quickly, and the terror left his eyes as Saunders continued smiling at him kindly.

"Jacky, you go ashore, now or in the morning, and tell the chief I want him to help me. You say if he won't I'll follow him with my magic right to his village, and all his wives shall bear monkeys, and his young men turn into blind hogs before their enemies."

CHAPTER VIII

MYNHEER OOPDYKE

IT WAS at the suggestion of the big Hollander that the skipper sailed his little ship across the Gulf of Papua and brought her to anchor in the estuary of the Fly River.

"Dere it is schnug und oudt ouf der vay ouf meddlers," the convalescent sufferer said on the morning after the magic exhibition.

Saunders visited him while Jacky was out scouting for his friend the chief, to whom the magic of the big red skipper had apparently proved only too convincing. Saunders had been rather dubious about the kind of reception he would get, but the fact that fruit had been sent aboard, and curiosity regarding the identity of the sick man together urged him to go.

He found him, as he had found him before, alone except for natives, and now, in broader light, he saw that the natives were of a very different type from those living either around Port Moresby or any other eastern settlement of Papua. He had wondered why the man had not put himself into surgical hands, and said so as he stepped

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forward to examine the dressings of the tremendous burn he had inflicted.

The sufferer laughed, and thereby endeared himself to the skipper forever, for only two kinds of men could laugh in such circumstances—the utterly callous, and the utterly courageous; and the utterly callous would not be likely to send presents of fruit to the impromptu surgeon.

"Dere is goot reason, my frient," the man rumbled throatily, regarding his visitor meanwhile with appraising steel-gray eyes that twinkled.

Saunders' own gray eyes twinkled in entire sympathy; for well he knew the manifold occasions on which a man might desire seclusion; and surgical aid in such corners of the earth as Papua is likely to be either hospital service or the well-meaning efforts of some medico-missionary, both of which kinds of aid are likely to conflict with the desire for seclusion.

"Dere is goot reason, which jou schall know vun day. For today, captain, I vill t'ank jou vor haffing courage enough to do vot no doctor vould haf risked, unt in a leedle time I am vell again. I am Frans Oopdyke. Jou I know. Dere are ferry few men oud here to whom Ret Saunders is unknown. If dere is anyt'ing I can do vor jou, I schall do it villingly, vor jou haf my life safed. But not here. Here I am under der clouds as jou say. In Dutch territory maybe I can serve jou."

Saunders swiftly decided that if this man recovered, as seemed likely, he might prove a useful friend in case Dutch territory had to be trespassed upon. He briefly told his plans, yet only in outline; sufficient to enable the man to determine whether he could be of service or not, insufficient to reveal any secret.

As a matter of fact, the throne and footstool of old Nuanou formed a topic which was no secret anywhere within a thousand miles or more of its supposed abiding place. The Dutchman's face, wan and haggard from fierce agony, writhed in an attempted smile. Only the smile of his eyes saved the attempt from being a most horrible contortion.

"To any odder man, I should say schtop right vere jou are," he said. "It is ouf no use so to say to jou. Jou haf started, und jou vill go t'rough, dot I know. So I vill yoost say dot it is von —— big venture jou are upon, captain, und repeat dot I schall do anyt'ing votefer I can to hellup. Not here may I do anyt'ing. Drop across to der Fly, captain. Dere I schall come by und join der party. To any who ask if jou haf seen Frans Oopdyke jou vill say, ja, him jou haf seen, und he is alretty better than det! More schall I not say now, but dis hint I vill drop: Mine bisness is not vit schtools und fine seats vor dirty savages; but, oh, mooch bigger. In pervorming mine own affairs I schall perhaps find means ouf aiding jou."

Saunders finished his replacement of the bandages he had examined while chatting, and stood up with a serious look on his face.

"The leg's as nice looking as such a thing is likely to be," he remarked, "but you'll fool me if you ever walk on it again!"

He glanced around the shack as he spoke, noting with a grimace some dozens of gin and brandy bottles. The place reeked with the odor of liquor. The naked savages crouched around the woven walls nodded in something very like stupor. Oopdyke chuckled and seized the skipper's wrist.

"T'ings are not always vot dey seem," he said in throaty gutturals. "Did my flesh like a drunkard's look? No, Saunders, I am not der man vot trinks oop all dot booze. Der bottles I keep to frighten avay der skypilot; der savages I gif liquor to so dot ven meddlers come dey scare dem avay too. Efery day I schpill von bottle ouf stinkin' schnapps der floor upon, und der place schmell like Dutch Zim's groggery on T'ursday Island, py —— But mineselluf, no, I trink a leedle ven I'm healthy, not von drop now. I schall der leg valk upon, nefer fear——"

"But man, the sinews——!"

"I know. Dey are frazzled und some are proken, but dere remain oders und vit dem I schall valk, nefer fear, though perhaps vit a hoppity-lickety kind ouf a gait. But vor jou, Saunders, I vould nefer haf walked again, except vit a leg ouf timber. So dot iss settled. Ven do jou sail? Make it qvick, und tell nobody vere are jou bound vor. Jou haf clearance papers from Finschaven?"

"No. My clearance is last from Astrolabe Bay for the Moluccas and way ports. That covered a call at Kaiserin Augusta River, if I chose to sail north about, or at Finschaven, Mullens Harbor, or here by the southern route. Covers everything, in fact, likely to turn up around any part of

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he Papuan Coast. But I left Finschaven vithout bothering the port authorities. Anyhow, it makes no difference unless the officials have managed to induce our own haps to keep an eye on me, because I didn't make entry at Finschaven either."

"How about here?"

"Why, so far as the thick-headed dear old thing here is concerned, I have simply called direct from Astrolabe Bay. I entered the vessel here all right. Why? Is the chappie here likely to prove deceptive? He looks a decent, good-natured, incapable ass."

"He is all dot, und more!" growled the Hollander angrily. "He is thick-headed, ja, und goot-natured, ja, und a donkey, all ouf dose t'ings he is, und all are harmless; but der babe in der vood beliefs dot Sherman officials can be shentlemans, und dot der presents all der time arrifing vor him vrom Sherman Papua is all oud ouf friendship vor him und not'ing else, py ——!"

"He'll bear watching!" Saunders exclaimed, anxiously.

Such a man might easily spill all the fat out of anybody's skillet into a particularly destructive fire.

"*Ja*, und jou'll be wise, und safer, und oud ouf reach ouf mischief if jou get right oud today und don't efer come back to Port Moresby until jou are forgotten! Vait vor me dere. Maybe one month, but come I schall. Don't vorry aboud me. Mine old cannibal vimmen know how to cure der burn jou made. Good-pye, und t'ousan' t'anks!"

SAUNDERS hurried down to the beach at the end of the lane where he had left his boat, for he desired nothing in the little town, and had less wish than ever to pass through its grassy streets since hearing the expressed opinion of Oopdyke. The only thing to detain him now was the failure of Jacky to persuade the old chief to return to the schooner.

His doubts upon that score were dissipated the moment he stepped out upon the sand, for Jacky was there before him, and with him one of the stalwart young spearmen, looking crestfallen, and in palpable uncertainty what form of magic the red-headed skipper was going to wither him to the ground with.

The man bore full arms as for the jungle trail—finely woven split-cane arm gauntlets, great biceps bangles of brass, head-band stuck full of trailing feathers, and a necklace of gruesome-looking teeth; and in his right arm he cuddled a sheaf of ten seven-foot spears, some steel-tipped, some bone, some having ragged, murderous looking heads of polished stone.

The skipper stared at him in amusement.

"Big chief send him fo' present fo' you, sar," Jacky made haste to explain.

"Present?" exclaimed Saunders. "What on earth for?"

"Present fo' you not to make magic fo' him only good magic, cappen," Jacky gabbled, licking his lips as if himself felt none too secure. Saunders stepped into the boat, chuckling, and motioned to the tall savage to sit beside him. The man stood like a stone, absolutely frightened out of all volition, until Jacky gazed appealingly at the skipper asking for a reassuring word.

"Oh, tell him he's safe enough if he belongs to me! What's he scared about?"

"He 'fraid you make debbil jumper in him hair again. De old chief he berry much 'fraid. Dem young woman she squeal all de night he beat her so bad. De old slave woman she run very fas' away when she see herself up in de sky ober de schooner las' night, an' she not come back yit. Ho yis, cappen, bery bad magic you make. Ole Chief he gib you dis fightin' man, and he say fo' me to tell you s'pose you no make no more bad magic ober him, and pramise to make plenty bery bad magic ober him enemy, he send one hundred mans with us dat know all de forest cl'ar up to de big black mountain."

The skipper roared with laughter, and his tremendous merriment went broadcast over the sea. His own men were grinning at the uneasy cannibal warrior, for only the skipper's powerful grip on his girdle had prevented the unhappy sacrifice to fear from leaping overboard spears and all.

"What did you tell him, Jacky?"

"I tole him dat I come fas' back wit' yo' answer."

"All right. Hop overboard and swim ashore again. Tell him not to be scared. I'm his friend if he's mine. Hurry back, because we sail right away. Whisper to the old scoundrel we're going to the Fly River, but look out nobody else hears. We'll look out for you. You'll have to swim out to the schooner. Go on, now, cut!"

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Tommy helped Jacky over the side with a willing heave, and the black, frizzy head reached the beach again as the boat ran alongside the schooner and hooked on to the tackles. In half an hour the anchor was up, and Jacky was almost at the schooner's side, apparently hampered as to speed by some burden he carried with extreme care. When he was hauled aboard, he ran panting to the skipper and flung down a bag of matting which he opened with fingers that shook with eagerness.

Looking up into his master's face, he turned the bag upside down, and rolled out upon the deck at his feet the greatest tribute a Papuan cannibal savage could possibly offer to another man. One—two—three— Three dull, soft thuds on the white planks, and—

"Holy mackerel!" uttered Saunders, his eyes wide with the surprize of one who knew quite well what such an offering meant. "Three—dried—heads! Some magic, I'll repeat!"

CHAPTER IX

VENNEKER COMES BACK

IT IS a scant two-hundred-and-forty nautical miles from Port Moresby right into the snuggest anchorage in the Fly River estuary; but what with calms in the Gulf, and adverse tides and unmarked shoals among the scores of flats and islands of the wide river mouth, the *Black Pearl* was still short of her desired haven at sunset of the third day. The heat was terrific, the evil odors of the fetid swamp lands and decaying animal matter drifting seaward on the muddy river flood rendered life a burden, and changed the usually cheerful crew of the schooner into frowning, songless creatures from whom even the Papuan warrior shrank in fear.

Only Red Saunders retained his clean, cool poise, continued shaving and bathing, and otherwise set an example which, of the rest, only grim old Tod Carter was shamed into making a bluff at following.

But twenty-four broiling, sizzling, stifling hours of boat, kedge, warp, and making and taking in sail proved too much for Tod. He let himself go in order that his greater physical discomforts might aid his vocabulary. So the schooner crept literally yard by yard into the river, a wide, forest-fringed stream with a broad yellow bosom bedizened with little jungle-covered jewels of gray mud, in which the silence of primeval worlds before life existed reigned until the anchor was let go and the roaring of the chain cracked the hush.

Then pandemonium awoke, and it seemed as if everything that flew, every breathing creature that had voice, every filthy habitant of the river slime rose up and hoarsely, shrilly, barkingly protested against the intrusion.

"Spread the awnings fore and aft, Tod, and get the boat overboard," Saunders ordered.

He examined the majestic forest on both sides intently through strong binoculars, and grimaced at the thought that appearances might please the vision much better than the reality suited the sense of smell. Up river the vista stretched like some great aisle in a colossal cathedral of Nature, diminishing as the stream wound around a bend until the eye stopped abruptly at a spot where river and sky and both banks were concentrated in one blotch of a green so dark as to be almost black.

"Here, Jacky," he called; "look yonder; your eyes are better than any glass ever made. Isn't that smoke?"

He indicated a part of the jungle almost abreast, in which the bewildering shades of green and blue, scarlet and yellow of foliage and flower, earth and wild fruit dazzled the eye, yet in which there seemed to be a sort of bluish vapor which hung among the forest growth rather too high and light to be the emanations of rotten vegetation or poisonous swamp reek.

"Dat smoke ob fire," announced Jacky without hesitation.

His frizzly mop of hair shook emphatically, and his thick brown lips parted in ludicrous warning.

"Bery bad mans lib here, massar. Ho yis! Dem eat odder mans, an' dey make debbil dance, an' dem don't care a blast fo' white mans only to eat dem too. My gorry, dat trufe, cappen!"

Saunders grinned appreciatively; for Jacky belonged to the greatest cannibal gang of them all before semi-civilization in the shape of frequent beatings took his appetite away for the time being. The black spot up the river looked like the mouth of a forbidding tunnel as the sun was swallowed up in the tremendous jungle behind it; the myriad life of the jungle

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ight tuned up its voice like the prepara-ory business of a vast orchestra, to burst nto terrific discordance the instant the sun ıtterly vanished and the swift darkness nveloped the scene.

A blackness for which black is an im-erfect name fell over river and stream, natching the hubbub of shrill insect cries, ıarsh yapping of small beasts, deeper roar of greater creatures, and sullen plop-plop of ıocturnal river lurkers; yet in both black-ıess and uproar there was a break, and in ne spot.

Where Jacky had detected smoke the blackness was fainter; there was an elusive, uncertain wavering glow, as if from a great fire deeper in the jungle. From the same spot came a break in the noise. In place of the riot of beast, bird and insect, was a deeper, more sonorous note that arrested attention as it persisted.

The skipper got up from the supper table, spread on deck beneath the awning, and listened keenly. It required but a moment's application to the sound for him to recognize it, for he had heard the like many a time before up African rivers.

"Tom-toms!" he snapped, turning to Carter with less of amusement in his face than he usually showed his mate at meals.

Jacky hovered near. His duty was to help Tomba about the pantry and to carry dishes to and from the deck table. He too heard the tom-toms, and as the skipper resumed his seat the savage's dark eyes glittered in anticipation, for he knew only too well the meaning of those drums, and he thoroughly believed now that his big red-headed master's magic was more powerful than that of all the cannibal priests of Papua together.

As for the warrior—Horatius, the skipper had named him because he looked so warlike—he stood like a glossy statue at the rail, his long spears gripped in the crook of his elbow, bending a stony face upon the worker of tremendous magic, confident that the magic of his master would protect him, yet fearful even of seeing it loosed upon his enemies, so dreadful in mystery was it.

TOD CARTER finished his supper in silence. He had been so long with Saunders that he had come to expect some outrageous declaration of intention whenever the skipper showed as much interest in anything as he now showed in those tom-toms. He sauntered over to the rail, filled a short cutty with shredded plug, and puffed luxuriously. Horatius gazed at him so appealingly that the grim old mate hauled out his plug again, cut off a piece as big as his thumb, and stuck it into the savage's cavernous mouth.

Neither uttered a word or sound. None was necessary, for somehow old Tod and the cannibal had got to regard each other as having a fellow feeling of intense loyalty to the big red captain, though perhaps from different motives, since fear emphatically was absent from old Tod Carter's make-up. So whenever Carter paced the deck on watch, and Horatius happened to be there, which was always, the little ceremony of sacrificing a four-man chaw of good tobacco to friendship was performed in silence and, on Horatius's side, in rapture.

Tod turned away when he had watched that colossal quid vanish, and found Saunders at his side fixedly gazing shoreward.

"I think I'll take a look over yonder," the skipper said, nodding shoreward.

His fine face was alight with almost boyish keenness as he concentrated his gaze upon the vague, will o' the wisp-like glow deep in the heart of that awesome jungle.

"Better let well alone!" retorted Carter quickly. "Last time we butted into a tom-tom hullabaloo y' know bloomin' well what come of it, don't yuh?"

"It was a jape, wasn't it?" chuckled Saunders reminiscently.

What he termed a "jape" consisted in getting himself grass-roped to a tamarind tree to be shot to death with poisoned darts inch by inch. Only unbelievable luck in the shape of a terrific thunder-storm had scattered his enemies a few moments before old Tod arrived and hauled him clear.

"But I want you to stand by the ship," he said.

"Then you ain't goin'!" snapped the mate.

As Tod walked away, to use up his agitation in sharp pacing of the deck, there arose far out in the forest where that glow was a swelling volume of sound that grew from a dull murmur of voices into a demoniacal howl. Saunders stiffened, and bent every faculty to listen.

Again the swelling chorus filled the forest, drowning out every other nocturnal sound; and this time there was another, arresting note, the note of a single voice pealing forth

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in a short, sharp burst of unbearable agony. Without a word Saunders leaped over the side into the boat.

"Call my crew, Carter. You needn't come!" he ordered.

Without orders Horatius slid down the rope, spears and all, and seated himself beside his master. Jacky hesitated for a moment before following, his shining face working with terror; but he followed, and in another minute eight stalwart Gilbert Island seamen tumbled into the boat and cast off the painter.

"Hold on!" roared Carter, running aft to the companionway.

The boat pulled clear. Old Tod came back, gripping a rifle, and peered into the dark river.

"Hold on, skipper!" he yelled, angrily. "If ye don't put back for me, I'll jump, an' well ye know I can't swim, darn ye!"

Laughing happily the skipper gave the order to back, and the ruffled mate was taken in too angry to talk. At a spot where the matted roots of the forest formed a natural embankment, and a tiny grassy glade broke the seemingly interminable barrier of the undergrowth, the boat ran in and was made fast.

Then, examining each man's weapons himself by the light of his electric torch, and assuring himself that Tod Carter had not come away in such haste as to omit seeing to the batteries in his own pocket lamp, Saunders strode into the fastnesses of the jungle, guided at first by unerring sense of direction, preceded by the cat-like eyes of the forest-bred Papuans, and presently coming upon the region of vague illumination from the distant fire.

Here he would have halted, to creep forward himself to scout, or send forward one of his own seamen, who, though less jungle wise than the Papuans, perhaps, were nevertheless at home in the woods at night, and in addition had been so long with Saunders that they had lost much native superstition and gained a whole lot of their master's cool courage. But as he paused with upraised hand, out of the weirdly dancing medley of shadow and glow ahead pealed that shriek again, and there was a note in it, quite noticeable now, which tensed every sinew and nerve in the skipper's frame.

"By Godfrey! That's the yell of a white man, Tod!" he cried. "Ready, lads? Follow me close, don't blaze away until I give the word, and then don't stop!"

So abruptly that it came as a greater shock than even the horror of it would alone induce, they burst through a thick hedge of oleander full upon a wide clearing so level, so thickly hedged around, so impenetrable overhead that it appeared almost a work of man rather than Nature.

A circle of small fires spluttered around the rim of the space, and in the center blazed a leaping, roaring fire, over which was a huge spit upon forked saplings, and about which danced a hundred hideously painted, feathered, skull-festooned cannibals yelling with frenzy as the newly replenished fire leaped higher.

On the spit was a man, a white man, bound with green withes to the spit, and as he slowly twisted, the spit being turned by a savage at either end well clear of the fire's heat, the agonized face came toward Saunders and his party. The eyes were closed, the hair singed, eyebrows gone, clothes beginning to catch fire. The ghastly cookery had apparently but just started. But a smothered curse burst from Saunders as he recognized that tortured face.

"Venneker!" he choked. "Come lads! Let drive!"

He plunged forward into the thick of the leaping horde with his heavy automatic pistol spitting viciously.

Impelled by the one motive, Carter darted first of all to one end of the spit. His gun scattered the features and brains of the turnspit at that end, and he snatched the pole from the fork just as he realized that Saunders had done the same thing at the other end. Barely had they laid down Venneker clear of the blaze, when the frenzied cannibals poured down upon them, mad with lust for white flesh, insane with fury at the interruption.

Kneeling beside the rescued man, the skipper and old Tod sighted every shot and fired steadily into the devilish mob. As he turned to meet a flank attack, Saunders caught sight of Jacky and Horatius—Jacky had snatched half of Horatius's spears—fighting like demons, dancing as wildly, yelling as fearsomely as the cannibals themselves, and making good in an amazing fashion. As for the crew of the *Black Pearl*, they fought with the cool steadiness of their beloved skipper and revered old mate, wasting never a shot,

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ever flinching when the long spears took loody toll.

Still the odds were too great. Saunders ad seen the beaters of the tom-toms draw ack as he first charged through the oleaners, and now they began beating the war adence, urged on by a hideous shape of aint and human hair, teeth and tiny skulls, hat capered and howled before them.

Responding with blind obedience the annibals came on afresh, and Jacky and loratius were driven back upon their gunrmed friends, both sadly in need of patchng as to shiny black skin. And both urned a reproachful gaze upon their kipper, the worker of wonderful magic, vho seemed content to let them die while ıe refused to call down lightning to strike heir foes.

Saunders saw them, and knew their thoughts. He grinned crookedly, for he was by no means untouched, and none knew better just how desperate was the plight he had led his men into with his usual impetuosity at the call of distress. He could not even move his men away from the great fire. The heat was almost unendurable, without any other troubles. He determined to try the only small trick at his call.

"Give me a handful of your rifle cartridges, Tod," he said without turning his head.

Tod passed over a huge fistful of high power .250-.3000 shells without a word and without for a moment neglecting his pistol work. What bothered him at the moment was how to find time to reload his empty magazines when his pistol had accounted for three more enemies. He had a spare magazine, but it was that one he was now using. The other was emptied long ago. The skipper jerked the cartridges into the heart of the fire, without even his own men noticing the action.

"Have to take chances where the slugs fly!" he grinned.

It was like a terrific gamble, with Death the stake. The wild-flying bullets might as easily kill friend as foe, or might as easily touch neither. As he resumed his steady pistol practise, knowing that in ten seconds he must lead his lads in a desperate charge or go down under scores of spears, unless those cartridges created a diversion, he curtly ordered his two Papuans to get behind him and crouch down.

"Magic coming, Jacky!" he uttered, and as he spoke the red heart of the great fire was stirred to its depths, and a series of sharp, splitting explosions began, with bits of blazing wood flying all ways.

Down went the heads of Jacky and Horatius together with a howl; but it was as nothing compared with the yell of terror that arose from the capering cannibals, most of them stung by flying fire and seared by wild bullets that came unseen and unexpected, stinging them like bees of the fiend. In the brief respite the pistol magazines were reloaded, and their fire added to the panic. In a few seconds the cannibals recovered their locomotive powers, and used them to carry them away from that haunted glade as fast as legs could move. "Now, boys!" cried Saunders, leaping to his feet. "Anybody hurt too badly to march? Right-ho! Catch hold of Venneker, four of you, and make tracks! Magic's all right, but we're a bit short of material tonight."

Swiftly and silently they regained the river; and Venneker came back to the schooner from which he had fled so unaccountably back there off the Louisades.

CHAPTER X

SURPRIZED

IT WAS cool gray dawn before Saunders and old Tod Carter left Venneker asleep and sought their own neglected bunks. Not only had they wrestled with terrific burns and blisters in making the returned wanderer as comfortable as their modest resources permitted, but, in the short, lurid spell of consciousness that came like a horrid visitation of devils to the tortured man, they had seen to their disgust the condition he must have been in before the cannibals started to cook him.

Venneker was steeped so thoroughly in alcohol that he only dimly realized the torment he had passed through, and in not the slightest degree did he guess where he was or who had made any kind of waking whatever possible for him.

The sun followed swiftly upon the first gray of dawn, as is usual in equatorial latitudes, and except for a watchman as tired as the rest, the crew of the *Black Pearl* slumbered, anchored in the river, most of them bearing more than a scratch by way of memento of the night's adventure. One

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of them, Jerry the Strong, who had been of the boat's crew, was by way of imitating Venneker himself as to condition, but not in any way due to alcohol.

Jerry was one of the little band who had managed to stop a seven-foot spear in mid-flight with his brawny right shoulder, and felt no better for it.

The anchor watch nodded, swore softly after the white man's way, and marched the deck to keep himself awake. The great brazen sun poured streams of fiery rays down upon the river, and baked wood and metal far beyond the human endurance point. The watchman dipped himself a bucket of water overside and sluiced his scorched feet. The mere sound of the tinkling water was a boon; it was answered with feverish impatience by a voice from the dim, uncomfortable forecastle where Jerry lay sweating with heat and squirming with the pain of his wound.

The watchman dipped a full hook-pot of fresh water from the deck cask under the awning, and stepped softly below with it. He was below ten minutes, which was not perhaps too long for a solitary man to steal when anchored in midstream and surrounded by so palpably peaceful a landscape. He finished just one pipeful of soothing plug tobacco, and returned to his post, casting a brief glance shoreward before settling into his coil of rope again.

Over the midstream side it came—silent, swift, seemingly out of nowhere—a quiet little "phut," and the watchman sank right into his coil with an arrow sticking out between his shoulders. Before the seaman had ceased quivering, the rail was lined with fiendish masks, feathered, painted, grinning, the faces of war-medicine men bent upon grim deviltry. The schooner's decks lay deserted to their evil whim.

In the forecastle Jerry groaned, and the clatter of his tin hook-pot resounded as he flung it down in peevish protest at its emptiness. The painted savages halted with a start of alarm, but only until they located the sound, then danced silently and swiftly along the decks, some aft, some to the forecastle slide, with no man to remind them that the *Black Pearl* was not used to such intrusion.

The chief of them all, a six-foot travesty on man bearing a bleached skull in one hand, and decorated with long, silky tresses of brown hair about his dirty neck, carried in his free hand a full set of gold-stopped false teeth, which, with savage skill, he had adapted to his needs so that he could fix the two halves of the set to fingers and thumb and snap them like castanets. This he was doing, while something he had inside the bleached skull rattled with ghastly effect in time to the clicking of those ravaged teeth.

No other sound broke the tense stillness. Even the small river breeze seemed to pause as the line of marauders took possession of the ship and covered all outlets.

Then Venneker awoke. He awoke to every torment known by the victim of delirium plus some of his own *induced* by the terrible bodily agonies he suffered. He opened eyes and mouth at once, filled his lungs, and sent such a yell pealing through the ship as aroused every man on board with a start, and sent the devil-men back from cabin and forecastle entrances in standing leaps.

Into their midst rushed Venneker, brandishing in one hand a full brandy bottle unopened, and with the other reaching out in the extremity for means of opening it. Unseeing, unreasoning, he plunged headlong into the mob of savages, and they backed in uncertainty until they realized in the man nothing more than a drunken white; then a growl arose, and a savage aimed a spear at Venneker.

Footsteps began to clatter on cabin and forecastle stairs, and the flaming red head of Saunders peered over the slide just at the instant when the savage quivered the spear to cast it and Venneker let fly the full bottle in mad frenzy.

The bottle reached its mark first, smashing upon the spearman's hideous face and turning the painted mask into a mask of live blood. The spear stuck in the mainmast and the next moment Saunders was out on deck, a handspike in one hand and his pistol beginning to spit fire, while from forward and aft ran the crew, picking up their weapons as they came.

IN TWO breaths the little ship was a seething center of mad fighting. True to his type, Tod Carter first uttered a terrific curse of discontent at being deprived of sleep, then settled down to the work in hand like a Trojan. He whipped out his sheath-knife as he bounded over to the rail and peered over. Six long canoes lay there, on the midstream side of

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the schooner, and through the painter of each he slipped the knife, letting the craft drift away.

"Now bullies!" he roared, leaping straight at the nearest devil-dancer, "into the river wi' 'em! They ain't got no boats. Make 'em swim, th' scuts!"

Venneker lay crying ludicrously across the cabin skylight, all his crazy vitality gone, weeping only for the lost liquor. A seaman darted forward to clap shut the forecastle hatch over Jerry, who was scuffling futilely at the ladder, trying to butt into the mess; then the devil-men drew together into some degree of order, and, outnumbering the crew two to one, began to make headway in spite of the rifles of the crew and the skipper's pistol. Jacky played stoutly with a windlass brake, and made good as a bruiser; but his glittering black eyes sought out the skipper from time to time in hope of some of that amazing magic developing.

As for Horatius, that grim cannibal had seen enough magic to feel assured that his master couldn't be beaten, and he fought stolidly on, in sheer faith that when things became too critical Saunders would reach up and grab a thunderbolt with which to confound his foes.

The skipper's pistol was empty, and there was no chance of slipping the magazine to recharge it. His spare magazine was in his drill coat, below, and he saw a slobbering savage grabbing for Venneker's heels as the unconscious man lay on the skylight.

"Drop that!" he growled, and brought down his handspike full upon the woolly head, felling him with a crunch.

Then, with a swift charge he reached the skylight, seized Venneker, and dragged him into the companionway. In the devil-dancer grabbing at Venneker's heels he recognized one of the tom-tom beaters of the near feast of the previous night.

The savage, in turn, knew him, and the thought buzzed in his bestial brain that here were men being speared; blood streaked the decks, and none of that terrific magic against which he and his fellows had arrayed themselves in all the hideous panoply of witch medicine was forthcoming. The thought stirred the savage's fighting blood to bubbling, and he sprang at the skipper with spear at the poise.

With an empty pistol, Saunders had only the handspike to rely upon; but it was a deadly tool in such capable hands. Dropping the pistol at the lanyard end, he presented his wooden pole as the savage presented his spear, except that he used both hands; and when the spear thrust came, he turned it aside with a swift overhand whirl of the spike, recovered, and drove the butt of the pole straight into the middle of the savage's astonished face.

His tremendous rush had carried him into the midst of the battling invaders, and another foe singled him out, less afraid of the wooden pole than of the empty pistol. There was no visible point to the pole; and the savage had not seen the mess made of his comrade's features two seconds earlier. Tod Carter was leading a rally to burst through and scatter the enemy, but was hard pressed.

Saunders fought subbornly, coolly, and with terrible efficiency; his new antagonist dodged his first sweeping blow, slipped forward and stabbed swiftly with his spear, slicing the skipper's scalp like a new hair-parting, then was sent hurtling back, upsetting a half-dozen of his fellows, under a tremendous thump in the stomach from the thick end of the handspike. The enemy rose after knockdowns with brutish pertinacity, except those who had been shot, until Tommy, the Gilbert Island bosun, was seized with a brilliant notion and grabbed a tail-block by the rope tail. Whirling the fearsome weapon about his head, Tommy uttered a long-disused war-yell of his own people and entered the fight like a destroying angel.

"Now, bullies!" roared Tod Carter, spitting on his hands and getting a fresh nip on his sweat and blood greased knife-haft. "Get th' skipper clear, me lads, and——"

"Here's another gang!" shouted Red, suddenly diving for the legs of his encircling adversaries and plunging through as the mate led the outside charge.

More than one grimly silent mouth gave vent to an involuntary gasp of departing hope at the skipper's cry, for along the landward rail of the schooner appeared fifty frizzy heads—fifty grinning, demoniacal faces, ugly as distorted sin—and thrice fifty seven-foot spears spiked high into the air alongside the heads.

"Come on, lads!" yelled the skipper, grabbing a carved club from a fallen savage; "more the merrier! That's one less!"

He smote lustily, and a painted head

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turned into a bloody pulp. And his lads yelled in loyal chorus, almost but not entirely drowning that other, fresher yell that now pealed out from the new attackers at the rail.

Then that fresh charge came on. Spears and clubs flashed, in sympathy with gleaming teeth and glistening blood, and the fight filled the little schooner's decks from rail to rail. And strangely enough, the fiercer the fight grew the more progress the *Black Pearl's* crew made. Saunders caught sight of one withered old savage in the forefront of the battle, a wizened old shape amazingly agile and borne forward as if on springs, fighting like a fury, and yelling like ten scorched devils!

"Hooray!" he yelled, with fresh vitality. "It's Jacky's old pal. Forward, lads! Give 'em Helen May!"

CHAPTER XI

OLD LONG AND THE DUTCHMAN

WHEN the decks were finally cleared, that part of the river was safe for the *Black Pearl* for many a year to come. Not soon does the savage mind forget such an adversary as that red-headed sailor had proved, with his crew of smiling devils, his amazing knack of pulling victory out of the thickest clouds of certain defeat, and, not the least of all his attributes, his more than amazing magic powers.

Even Jacky and Horatius utterly believed that the old chief and his fifty men had been called in at the critical moment by some silent voice of their captain's; the belief was not in the least weakened when the old villain stoutly asserted, under the benign, fructifying influence of a quart of trade gin, that the skipper had appeared to him in the midst of the forest while he slept, and commanded him to march without delay.

"Did he march?" grinned the skipper.

"No, sar," Jacky replied in awed accents; "him say he know dat not'ing can happen to us ontil he come, anyway, fo' de debbil hisself can't hurt you, so he jes' dribble along at daylight, sar."

In order that the fifty extra mouths to feed might not deplete his stores so far as to compel him to make a back trip for more, Saunders established a camp abreast of the schooner in the forest and not only made the old chief's men feed themselves but largely contribute to the schooner's larder as well.

There were three reasons, all excellent, for his continued anchorage in the unwholesome river. He and all his crew were more or less cut and battered up in the scrap and needed rest before commencing an arduous river and mountain pilgrimage; Venneker was in the throes of a drunken debauch, having stolen liquor while the fight was afoot and swallowed every drop of three pints to the dire set-back of all his own terrible firescars; and, perhaps the chief reason of them all, Saunders was expecting daily the appearance of Frans Oopdyke.

Everything had happened that he thought might up to now, except the Dutchman's arrival. True, Jacky's friend had only brought half the hundred men he had promised in return for immunity from bad magic, but the fifty had shown themselves very capable; true, also, Venneker had come back in bad shape, and was a doubtful asset to the party; but he had turned up, though like a bad penny, and the skipper could see no reason to doubt that Oopdyke would break out of the jungle fastnesses one day soon, if not a whole man, at least four-fifths of such a man as could afford to lose a fifth and yet be man enough.

"What's his name, Jacky?" Red asked Jacky late that evening when Jacky returned from shore with a great leaf-bundle of wild fruits and a tremendous fish, gifts from the old cannibal chief.

"Him name Vellalonga."

"Very long? Well, what is it? We'll chop off a bit and use that."

"Vellalonga him name, sar," repeated Jacky, as puzzled at the skipper's interpretation as Saunders was at the name.

"Oh, his name's Vellylong, hey? Well, tell him in the morning his name's Long while he's with us. Can't give him a bit more. And when you see him, tell him to make good lookout down river and along jungle paths for that Dutchman. Here, better tell him now. Take him a bottle of gin and some tobacco for his men, and tell him to send out scouts right away. Oopdyke ought to be here any hour now, unless that leg went bad again."

OOPDYKE came aboard in a manner which, once performed, did not astonish Saunders very much. It was, in truth, at a hoppity-lickety gait that he came, as he had foretold, but it was fast

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enough and direct enough to assure all who saw it that it was a he man and no jungle fool who had arrived.

Two scowling blacks came with him, and between them they bore old Long himself, who was squirming and gasping with rage. Dumping him down, they stood like wooden totems behind Oopdyke, who had flung himself sprawling upon the hatch as soon as he got on board the schooner, lifting a crooked leg in the air and massaging it furiously while he admonished Saunders to stop grinning, and ordered his own two stalwarts to grin or he'd flay them as soon as he regained his feet.

"So my old ruffian, Long, brought you in after all, Oopdyke," Saunders chuckled. "I thought that leg would make you late, so I sent him and his men along the path for you last night. Good trip?"

"*Ja!*"

The single word was at once an agreement, and a gem of sarcastic comment. Permitting his damaged leg to rest on the hatch, Oopdyke at last sat up and loaded his big Dutch pipe with rank native tobacco. The moment his first tremendous smoke puffs had sent every singing mosquito speeding for air, he glanced at Saunders with twinkling eyes and remarked:

"Der oogly scoundrel said he vos mit jou, but I didn't pelief him. Ven a man schticks vun o' dem pluddy schpears mine neck pehind, I t'ink he's no frient ontil I prove it. So I pring him along, und use him for von hostage. Udderwise, mine frient, jou had neffer again seen Frans Oopdyke dis side ouf der Heafenly Gates, py Jiminy!"

"How's that?" Saunders inquired with a broad grin.

He had liked the big Dutchman at first; he liked him twice as well now.

"How? Vhy, der plessed yoongle is full ouf der queerest savages I effer see. Dey isn't der natives der British territory from, und dey ain't dem leedle imps ouf our own from der Marianne Straits, nor yet from our mountains. I neffer see not'ing like dem fellers except vunce ven I trespass in der Sherman country beyond our line, und den dey vos eating ten baked vomans vot had bore der chief girls instead ouf warriors, py Jiminy! Ja, und dere vos a Sherman der, too, but he vos eadin' pig."

"How did you get clear?"

"Dem cannibals vos too full to run!"

"Yes, but what about the German?"

"I shot der —— schwine! Dot's vhy jou find me down in British territory. Der Shermans make der beeg holler for mine scalp, und mine people tell me make mine-selluf scarce awhile so dey can search for me to hang me und satisfy national honor. So here I am mit plenty ouf troubles for jou, mine frient. Dis time I haf also to t'ank jou dat mine leg carry me so far. Jiminy! Jou are von —— ouf a doctor all right! I can feel dot ret-hot gun barrel now, eading into mine leg, und efery time I schmell baked meat I t'ink ouf it und grind mine teeth. But I lofe jou, Ret Saunders, jou olt pirate!"

Silently he seized the skipper's hand, and the men exchanged a grip that satisfied each of the other's utter cordiality and mutual unity of purpose in what might come. Then Saunders gave a moment to old Long, the most humiliated cannibal ever seen except in actual captivity.

"What for you stick spear in my friend's neck for, Long?"

The old savage scowled up at the Dutchman as if afraid that he might produce another exhibition of terrific strength such as had disarmed him and brought him captive down to his own master's ship. He muttered an answer in his native tongue.

"Him say him not know him fo' frien', sar," Jacky interpreted. "Him say he not sabbee dem two feller black man wid him. Him say he no t'ink yo' frien' come wid only two mans, sar, so he try fo' make sure."

"Well, tell him to muster his men with food for a march. I want him to follow the river with us all the way we go with the ship. After that, we'll see when that time comes. How about the river, Oopdyke? How far can we carry our draft—twelve feet?"

The big Hollander lolled back on the hatch like a man who has endured all the hardships of a long trail and would prefer to rest before talking of further journeys. His big porcelain pipe sent forth billows of suffocating smoke that effectually cleared that end of the schooner of mosquitos.

His two men chewed stolidly upon whole sticks of trade tobacco, doubtless believing themselves the equal of their master, since he, though white and bearing fire-guns, smoked the common leaf which they were compelled to chew whenever he deigned not to bestow largesse of shiny, black, hard cakes of white man's weed upon them. Each wore about his sooty neck a tinkling necklace of tin disks, crescents, hearts, and

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diamonds taken from various sorts of plug tobacco, and no king of foreign state ever owned jewels more precious.

"Oop to der Holland boundary jou can go, captain, py using der highest water und maype hauling py der trees," said Oopdyke. "Py der Strickland riffer jou may go, too, mitout boddering our line at all, but nopody effer vent oop dot Strickland und come pack to tell vhere der riffer run."

"Have you got to return to Dutch Papua to complete the business you're working on?" asked Saunders after a moment.

In a flash it had come to him that in seeking for the throne and footstool of old Nuanou he was butting into much bigger things, and, as ever, he would just as soon enlist on the side of the fellow he liked, and let his own affairs go west, as not; though, to be true to the character of Red Saunders, it must be said that if he could also attain his own object while joining in the rumpus of another man he would be doubly well suited.

"Py Chames, no!" rapped Oopdyke, suddenly sitting erect on the hatch. "Didn't jou tell me ouf dot scallawag Neuman?"

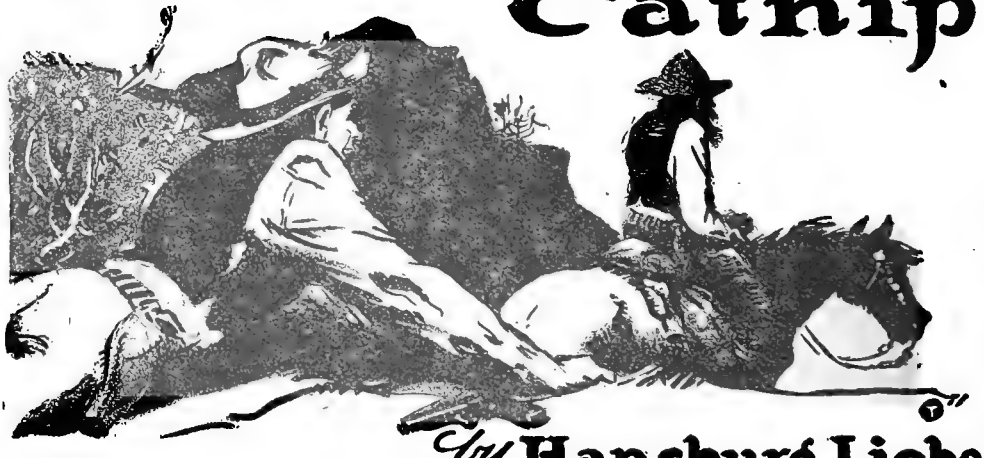
"What about Neuman? What has he to do with you or me or our affairs down here? Up there where I met him, yes—if he's what you say, a double-dealing cad, but here——"

"Pouf!" grunted Oopdyke, smothering himself and all around him with smoke that reeked like burning camel stables. "Oop dere, down here, everywhere he iss to pe vatched! Und all ouf his breed, mine frient. Neffer yet schall jou find von ouf his kind dot shall play mit der straight game ven comes it down to poundaries. Herman Neuman is vor his own peoples. Frans Oopdyke is vor his, Ret Saunders he is vor Ret Saunders und his frients—frients first, as I have heard, captain. Me, I haf nod to go pack until I——"

An interruption came, two-fold. From the cabin pealed the waking yell of Venneker; from the shore shrilled a native voice which announced a stranger appearing far down at the river mouth.

TO BE CONTINUED

Catnip



By Hapsburg Liebe

Author of "So-Long, Jim," "The Hick," etc.

Catnip: A plant of the genus Nepeta. . . . . Cats are fond of it, and hence the name.—WEBSTER.

IF BOBCAT BRADSHER had anything like a single redeeming trait, it lay in his odd, twisted sense of humor; it must in fairness be admitted that he laughed now and then, though this laugh was never pleasant to the ear. He had been bad all his life. And he looked it.

Slender and wiry, quick as lightning, sharp featured, sallow skinned, with washed-out pale-blue eyes that seemed as opaque as faded blue paint; merciless, relentless, with never a care for the feelings of anybody else; cunning as a fox but

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urious, tricky to friend and foe alike—that vas Bobcat Bradsher.

Bobcat was no nickname. His father, of he same timber exactly, had named him hat with the idea of getting even with him or sundry months of infantile squalling due o colic and perverse nature.

A young high sheriff, Osborn Day, had een forced to kill old Bradsher in order to ave his own life. At the age of nineteen, Bobcat had killed Osborn Day—waylaid im like a greaser, and shot him in the back. The next sheriff, Jim Cousins, eventually ost his job because of his inability to bring he Ironhead Mountain country's terror to ustice.

Old Bill Day, father of Osborn, ran for he sheriff's office with the sole intention of ringing down the killer of his son, and everybody knew of that intention, and nine of every ten of the county's votes were cast for Bill Day on that account.

Day was a tall and gaunt, bearded, silent man. On the morning following his taking the oath, he rode for "Murray's X Roads," a post office hamlet in the very shadow of the Ironhead, on the killer's trail. Young Bradsher, lying flat on a cliff above the crooked mountain road, took an automatic pistol of heavy caliber from inside his tattered blue shirt and proceeded to get a beautiful aim at the new sheriff's nickel-plated badge of authority. But he didn't fire. He wasn't altogether a fool, this Bobcat. Bill Day was an old man, and feeling was already high, and if he killed Bill Day the county would rise almost to a man to avenge his death.

The old sheriff knew that, too, or he would not have ridden in the open in such a manner. Neither was he a fool.

But Bobcat could not resist the temptation to taunt—

"Hello, gran'pap!"

"Good mawnin', suh," coolly and quietly replied Bill Day, without even turning his head.

He was originally from Georgia.

"Whereabouts do ye think ye're a-goin', gran'pap?" Bobcat drawled from his hiding-place.

"To the hangin', suh," said Osborn Day's father, and he didn't turn his head even now. "It's a sort of roundabout way, but I'm certain to arrive sometime."

Bradsher laughed.

"Whose hangin', gran'pap?"

Day rode on in silence. Bradsher made more sallies, and still there was neither answer nor reply. It is hard to quarrel with a man who won't talk, which is a good thing to remember. When the old sheriff had ridden out of the range of his vision, Bradsher rose in the stunted undergrowth that lined the top of the cliff, slipped his automatic inside his shirt and ran the barrel between his belt and his side to hold it, and hastened back to his horse.

It was a shipped-in Western horse, of the hardy buckskin type, and it suited Bradsher perfectly; he had stolen it from a lowland farmer. Bradsher swung himself into the rawhide skeleton-saddle and dashed off through the laurels, lying so close to the buckskin's back that he seemed almost a part of it.

An hour later, at a point some fifty yards from a dim and narrow trail, Bobcat dismounted; he listened for a moment, heard nothing, dropped his horse's rein, and crept forward on foot. He had to wait half an hour for the rake whom he had sent to the Cross Roads store for tobacco and matches, and he sat down on the hemlock needles and whittled the thirty minutes away restlessly.

Tucker McHennis was whistling a jig when he came. Had it been a hymn that he was whistling, Bradsher would have remained hidden and silent. McHennis got the major part of his poor living from the outlaw's hand, and they had a code of signals all their own.

"Ef I'd ha' had to wait jest two more minutes on you, Tuck, d'ye know what I'd do?"

Bobcat stepped from the laurels and took a small red tin from his henchman's hand as he spoke.

"N-no," said the lout, paling a trifle.

Bradsher passed the point of a forefinger across his throat, and made a clucking noise with his tongue and the roof of his mouth.

"That," said he.

"I heared the storekeeper say that the' was a letter come fo' you, Bobcat," muttered Tucker McHennis.

The post office at Murray's X Roads was in Eb Atchley's general store.

"A letter!"

"A letter," nodded Tuck. "Been expectin' any mail?"

"Shore," growled Bradsher, and it was a lie. "You hike back there and git me that letter, Tuck. 'Tain't more'n a mile or so;

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I'll gi' ye jest three-qwaters of a hour to make the trip, a-guessin' at the time. And you watch out fo' Bill Day, the new sheriff; I happen to know he rid out that way not long ago."

Tucker McHennis hastened toward the Cross Roads. Forty minutes afterward he was back—whistling an old hymn; it was like a pearl in the mouth of a snake. He passed on, still whistling, and Bobcat kept low and still and watched.

But nobody was following McHennis, and Bradsher rose and overtook the lout.

"Well?" he demanded, stepping from the laurels.

"Bill Day was in the store," said McHennis, "and it wouldn't ha' done to ax fo' the letter. He kept his eye on me when I left, and I was afeared he'd trail me."

"Right," agreed Bobcat, narrowing one of his opaque, washed-out blue eyes. "Right, Tuck. Tuck, the's sartain times when you've got mighty nigh as much brains as a good dawg."

Soft footfalls in the dead leaves, and Bobcat Bradsher was gone. Tuck McHennis went on down the dim trail, homeward.

Back at his waiting pony, Bradsher thrust his sunbrowned, dirty hands into his trousers' pockets and whispered to himself:

"I wonder what's in that letter? I never got a dozen letters in my whole life. I wonder who'd be a-writin' to me? I wonder? And I'm a-goin' find out ef every tree in the woods turns into a sheriff."

He mounted the buckskin, which appeared to be sleeping. He took from the waistband of his trousers a pin, and jabbed the pony maliciously with it. The animal came to life like dynamite, and Bradsher laughed wickedly as it tore through the laurels with him.

Tucker McHennis lived alone in an old cabin in a cove made half dark by towering hemlocks. When he wasn't doing something for Bradsher, he dug ginseng, or trapped—or slept. An hour by sun, Bobcat found him sitting in the doorless doorway, sound asleep and snoring; Bradsher called to him, and he snored on, and the outlaw dismounted and proceeded to kick him to his feet.

"Hatch up somepin' to eat, Tuck," he ordered menacingly, "and be quick about it, or else——"

Again he passed a forefinger across his throat with an ominous cluck. McHennis fell to building a fire in his broken and wired-together old cast-iron stove, and his fingers trembled. Bradsher hid his buckskin in a thicket behind the cabin, came back and sat down in the doorway.

"Tuck," he said finally, "even ef I had that letter, I couldn't read what's in it. I cain't read ner write, Tuck."

"So cain't I, neither," mumbled the lout at the broken stove.

"What'll I do about it, Tuck?"

"Git somebody else to read it fo' ye, Bobcat," suggested McHennis.

Bobcat Bradsher swore.

"Nobody around here that can read wouldn't tell me the truth about what's in it, Tuck. Ain't nobody around here can read but a few o' them folks at the Cross Roads, and they all hates me the same as I do a copperhead."

McHennis agreed.

"All the dawg-gone same, I'm a-goin' to have that letter. I'm a-goin' to have it tonight, ef I haf to hold up the store and the post-office to git it," and Bradsher swore again.

Curiosity, they say, once killed a cat.

THE mountain evening came down with a decided chill, and the Murray's X Roads storekeeper made a fire in the big wood-burning stove that stood in the center of the long, log-walled room. He and old Bill Day took chairs near by and began to discuss things political, which led easily to the matter that had caused Day to run for the office of high sheriff.

"You're too far along in years, Bill," frowned Eb Atchley, "for a job o' this kind. I edvise you to chuck it."

Bill Day turned his sober gaze upon his companion and said simply—

"But he killed my boy."

Atchley said nothing to that. Sheriff Day went on:

"Bobcat Bradsher made a reg'lar puh-fawmin' monkey out o' Jim Cousins, suh. I protested. I told Jim, suh, that his whole constitution wouldn't pan out enough pep to enable him to arrest a doped house-fly. Maybe he got mad at that; I reckon he did, to tell you the truth, suh, because he flared up with something like this—

" 'Why don't you catch him yourself, Bill Day, if you want him caught so badly?' "

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The storekeeper nodded. The old officer ɔntinued:

"And I told him, suh, that I would, if I ɔuld git the sheriff job; and I've got the ıeriff job, and by the livin' Heaven I'll see obcat Bradsher in jail or die in my boots on ıe trail of him! Have you another match, .b, suh?"

Ten minutes of silence passed, silence ıve for the crackling of dry wood in the .ove. Then—Bobcat Bradsher, his autoıatic level in his right hand and his opaque yes filled with potential murder, walked ɔftly into the store.

"Keep quiet, gran'pap!" he snapped at ill Day. "Eb Atchley, I'll trouble ye now ɔ' that there letter o' mine what ye've got ı yore little post-office cawner over there."

Atchley rose and looked questioningly ɔward the sheriff.

"Git it, Eb," nodded Bill Day, "and give t to him. Don't you see, suh, he's got the drop on us?"

Atchley walked over to the corner that ıad been partitioned off as the Murray's C Roads part of the United States mail ervice, found a long white envelope that vas addressed to Mr. B. Bradsher, Esq., nd delivered it into the hands of the outaw.

"Quiet, remember, gran'pap," Bradsher autioned again, and with that he backed ut of the store and into the darkness. A ew seconds later, his voice came tauntingly:

"Haw, haw, haw! Hee-haw!"

Sheriff Bill Day sprang to his feet, his ight hand filled with blued steel and polshed black walnut, and dived out by way ɔf the side door. He heard the hoof-beats ɔf a horse, saw the rider's indistinct figure, eveled his big revolver and fired twice. Quick as a wink Bradsher's automatic ɔegan to throw fire and lead like a machine-gun—*rat-a-tat-tat-tat!*—there was the tinkle ɔf broken glass from the store windows—which was immediately followed by laughter from the western mountainside:

"Haw, haw, haw! Hee-haw!"

Eb Atchley hurried out with an old-fashioned, big-bored rifle in his hands. He drew up beside Bill Day.

"Bill, you—" he began, when Day broke in:

"I know what you're goin' to say, Eb, old friend; you're goin' to say, suh, that I cain't do it. But with God's help, I can do it, and good-night to you, suh!"

Just as a few men and boys arrived to inquire what and where the trouble was, the father of dead Osborn Day melted into the gloom, going toward the western mountainside.

Bobcat Bradsher, who knew every trail and pig-path for miles upon miles around, rode like wildfire until his judgment told him that he was for the time being safe from pursuit; then he doubled back, watched for a quarter of an hour, and turned for the mildewed old cabin of Tucker McHennis.

McHennis, as usual, was asleep. Bradsher dismounted, left his horse standing, kicked a soap-box chair out of the doorway, and walked in.

"Up from there, Tuck," he rasped, "or I'll——"

In the darkness there came once more that ominous cluck. McHennis, now wide awake, knew very well that Bradsher was passing the point of a forefinger across his throat, and McHennis trembled in every limb and fiber. It had become quite an obsession—he had come to believe implicitly that some day Bobcat would cut his head half off.

"Make a light," ordered Bradsher.

McHennis obeyed. The oil lamp threw a dim and yellow glow. Bobcat got down on his knees beside it, took the letter from inside his ragged blue shirt, and tore off carefully one end of the long white envelope. He drew out the single sheet, unfolded it in a vague expectancy, and stared at it in a bewildered sort of chagrin.

"It's printed!" he snapped. "I cain't read writin', and no more I cain't read readin'!"

The letterhead was in black, and neat enough; the type was pica-size and purple; the signature was in blue ink, and a very good specimen of Spencerian penmanship.

"The Gov'ment," mumbled Tucker McHennis, all ignorant of the fact that he was laying a pretty good foundation for a future achievement, "allus prints its letters that a-way. I seed a letter the Gov'ment sent to Eb Atchley oncet, and it was printed jest like that. Mebbe this here is from the Gov'ment, Bobcat."

"Gov'ment, ——!" impulsively roared Bradsher. "What would they be a-writin' to me about? Would they tell me to come in and git some red candy, or say they wanted to kiss me? Tuck, you simply ain't got enough sense fo' nothin'."

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McHennis subsided. But Bobcat was not unimpressed, his cynical outburst notwithstanding.

For a month Bradsher carried the mysterious letter inside his shirt without in the least guessing its import. He dreamed of it by night, and almost wore holes in it looking it over in the daytime. He found nothing much to do except keep his skin whole during that month; Bill Day had made things surprizingly hot for him when he ventured anywhere near the neighborhood of the Cross Roads.

Then curiosity began to drive Bobcat beside himself. He went to the Lower Pigeon River Section and tried to get the letter read to him. But they knew him, even there, and the few hill folk he found who knew how to read professed that they couldn't; they feared to tell the spitfire, whose automatic was always ready, the contents of the letter. Always it was the same—

"I'm sorry, but I'm like you; I cain't read ner write neither."

In despair, Bobcat rode back to the Ironhead Mountain country. Naturally, he sought the cabin of his former henchman, Tucker McHennis, in order to be fed.

"Talk to me quick!" he ordered, his opaque, pale-blue eyes two glowing spots of evil. "Has Bill Day gone back to Johnsboro yit, or is he still here?"

"Yes, he's gone back," chattered the frightened McHennis. "He fell offen a cliff and hurt hisself. Git the letter read, Bobcat?"

"No!" and Bradsher added an oath that would have put the proverbial swearing trooper to shame. After a moment's hard thinking, he strode over to the lout.

"Say, Tuck, I don't see nothin' the matter with you a-takin' the letter off some'eres to git it read by three different men so's we'll know whuther they're a-tellin' the truth or not. I believe the people I know is afeared fo' me to know what's in it. I believe lots of 'em 'at can read says they cain't fo' because they don't want me to know what's in the letter, a-hatin' me like pizen as they does. You can set yore stakes to go in the fore part o' tomorrer, Tuck."

McHennis nodded obediently.

"All right, Bobcat. I'm ready to go when you say go."

In the morning he started, and somewhat to his surprize and greatly to his relief Bradsher did not motion toward his throat with a cluck as he passed out at the doorless doorway.

Tucker McHennis was gone for two whole days, and he came back with a speech that he had rehearsed a thousand times in the hope that it would sound convincing. He was going to remove the fear of having his head cut half off by the desperate and conscienceless Bradsher, and he had hypnotized himself into believing that he could carry out his plan. McHennis was a rank coward, but he was a coward in a corner, and heaven knows that sort of man is as dangerous as nitro-glycerin.

So he talked and talked, tripping himself not in the slightest way, and Bobcat Bradsher accepted his word as gospel truth; Bradsher trusted only McHennis, of all the people in the world. Not that the outlaw thought the lout too good to betray him; he figured that McHennis didn't have the courage to play him false in even the smallest degree.

"That'll gi' me the run o' Johnsboro fo' a hour," beamed Bobcat, "and I'll do a little business with the bank. So long, Tuck: I'm a-ridin' hossflesh right now."

About the middle of the following morning, Bradsher rode up before Johnsboro's jail, dismounted, dropped the pony's rein and turned briskly for the main entrance.

In one corner of the brick and iron structure was the office of old Bill Day. At a table sat the sheriff and his predecessor, who had halfway become friends again. Bradsher walked in, put his automatic on the table with an air of surrender, and passed into the hands of the high sheriff the much-worn letter.

"This here," Bobcat began, "says I'm to have the rights o' citizenship and freedom ef I come in and give up my gun and make oath to live straight from now on. I've come to agree to that."

Day unfolded the dirty sheet, ran his eye over it, looked narrowly at Jim Cousins, and rose.

"All right," he said with a peculiar smile. "But I'll have to put you in a cell until due process o' co'te can be gone through with, suh. You won't mind that, suh? We feed well, and you won't have anything whatever to do."

"I—I guess I don't mind," said Bobcat. Anyway, Bill Day had taken up his gun. Two more minutes, and Bradsher was in

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the strongest cell of the Johnsboro jail. As the lock clicked, Bill Day laughed oddly, and Jim Cousins gave the sheriff a look of keen admiration.

"It beats the ——!" said Jim Cousins.

"The help o' God and Mrs. Wampler, suh!" said Old Bill Day, his voice fervent.

Bobcat was speaking—

"How long, do ye think——"

He broke off abruptly; suspicion was in his countenance.

"Oh, just a few days, until we can git things all ready to hang you, suh!" exploded the father of dead Osborn Day.

"B-but the letter!" cried Bobcat hoarsely.

Day thrust the sheet between the iron bars of the cell's door.

"To be sure!" he exclaimed. "That, suh, is yours, and I'm perfectly willin' for you to have it. I got one like it, and so did Jim Cousins here, and, I reckon, most everybody else. It's a fawm letter—an advertisement for Mrs. Wampler's Catnip Tea for Teething Infants, suh!"

Then he mimicked:

"Haw, haw, haw! Hee—haw!"

Taking Over Gettison

By Robert Simpson

Author of "The Goat-Man," "John Jock Todd," etc.

THIS was before the days of the Jardine hulk, the peak of Hugh Morrison's power in West African trade, or the genial Highland laments of Hogmanay Sandy MacGregor.

Gettison had come to Benin River from Opobo.

He had been the shop clerk down there and his job had consisted, to a great extent, of sitting upon the agent's right hand at eleven o'clock breakfast and seven o'clock dinner, and of keeping him in good humor by laughing at his jokes.

This was particularly hard on Gettison. Slimly, though athletically built, and boasting a small, carefully trimmed mustache, his lean, pale face, assisted by lazy gray-brown eyes, expressed a desire to give an impression of lackadaisical indifference to his surroundings in general and his contemporaries in particular.

Consequently, when the agency at Benin River became vacant, and Gettison was ordered by Marsden & Co.'s home office to "take it over," life for him began to assume something like its proper proportions.

No longer would he be required to officiate in a shop and swelter profanely while he paid out cargo to a greasy mob of half-clothed natives, who jabbered and screeched and gesticulated and offended his nostrils even more than they did his ear-drums.

Neither would he be compelled to exhibit poor taste by laughing at the ghastly witticisms of a man who was as funny as a churchyard crab.

"Taking Over Gettison," copyright, 1922, by Robert Simpson.

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Instead, he would sit upon his own veranda under a gently swinging punkah and become a demi-god.

And he was ready for it. He always had been ready. If he had been offered a provincial commissionership by the governor, he would have been ready for that, too. Gettison did not approach his new responsibility. It was asked to approach him.

Neither did he enthuse. It was perfectly all right, of course, for the other chaps to look forward to the prospect of an agency, with their eyes sticking out of their heads, but he saw no reason why he should become excited about the Benin River appointment.

The confounded thing was two years overdue, and Benin River was a rotten hole in any case. The billiard table they had there was as slow as a trade canoe, the mosquitoes were awful and the nearest doctor was at Sapeli.

Gettison strode the deck of the black-hulled cargo boat that carried him there as if the whole proceeding were more trouble than it was worth.

Curiously enough, however, Gettison was not a snob. Also, his faculty of doing everything to which he put his hand, just a shade better than it was being done by his fellows, had the disconcerting effect of silencing all criticism.

He was the only man in Opobo who had succeeded in winning anything from the new purser of the *Siluko* at poker. Wherever he had been stationed during his five years of actual residence on the Coast, he had displayed an uncanny genius for selecting and training Kroo-boy gig crews that could run away from everything in sight. He held the record for the fastest hundred and the biggest "break" ever performed on the Warri billiard table, and he had boxed the chief officer of the *Mayumba* to a creditable draw at the back of the general cargo warehouse at Bakana.

There were one or two officers of the Waffs—West African Field Force—who could shoot a little straighter than Gettison; but only one or two. Even Grant, who was the African Produce Association's agent at Calabar, admitted that Gettison was probably as good a man with a rifle as any on the Coast, and Grant had been a prize winner at Bisley in his day.

Therefore, Gettison was in the majority of respects a man, and the home office had ordered him to "take over" the Benin River agency because it felt that the place needed a man of his comparative youth and superlative ability to lift it out of a slump.

At least twenty-four hours ahead of his schedule, he reached the Benin River factory on a Saturday afternoon.

THE Kroo headman, accompanied by several of his boys, met Gettison at the gig wharf as he stepped ashore from the cargo boat's gig, and relieved him of further responsibility in the matter of his baggage.

"Take them for cap'n side," Gettison instructed, indicating his shiny black uniform cases. "I be new cap'n for this beach."

"Yessah, cap'n, sah," the headman acknowledged respectfully, and promptly ordered his boys around in his snappiest fashion to indicate to the new cap'n that he was the right kind of headman to have about the place.

Gettison passed on. He walked up a gravel path lined with ragged looking lime hedges and bordered by concrete gutters that had once been as white as whitewash could make them, but which were now so dirty as to be almost black, and were badly broken in places.

There was also one or two weeks' growth of weeds in the path, and, all over as much of the beach as Gettison could see, were further evidences of neglect.

Empty oil and rubber casks that should have been stored neatly in the oil-yard, cluttered the ironwood runners all the way down to the main wharf, and the majority of the casks looked as if they were sorely in need of the services of a cooper.

The uprights under the house veranda had not enjoyed a coat of tar for months, if Gettison were any judge of such matters, and white ants had begun a mass attack on some of them.

At the foot of the stairs leading up to the living quarters, the concrete slab, into which the stairs were built, was cracked and broken, and several of the steps looked as if they would be dangerous on a dark night.

Gettison discovered these things without looking for them, as he walked from the gig wharf to the house.

But he saw no sign of a white man.

Even if he were a day ahead of time, the rattling of the cargo boat's anchor-chain should have heralded her arrival in the

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iver. That sound, like the ringing of a loorbell, was always enough to bring the verage trading settlement to its feet and, t Benin River, where Marsden & Co. had hat particular part of the field entirely to hemselves, it was a rare day when there vere two steamers in the river at the same ime.

Gettison, therefore, was confronted with mystery.

It increased when, glancing past the tairs, he discovered that the door of the general warehouse was ajar. This circumtance unquestionably pointed to the presnce of a white man, since white men only were in possession of warehouse keys.

Gettison learned that his deduction was ccurate enough. There *was* a white man n the warehouse, and there was enough of im to make almost two of Gettison. In ddition to which he rolled off a few bales of piece cloth when Gettison shook him, then looked up at the new agent and inquired blearily:

"Whatsh matter? Who'n —— 're you shovin'?"

Gettison stood with his thumbs in the pockets of his white flannel trousers, his legs wide apart, and studied the sodden hulk on the floor as if to be sure that he would know him again. He knew he was the beach clerk because of the heavy bunch of keys on the clip of his belt, and presently, without a word, Gettison stooped quickly, removed the keys from the clip with the speed of a practised hand, and paying no attention to the big man's bellow of surprize and rage, promptly left the warehouse.

He had little difficulty finding the right key. Padlocks and keys on Marsden & Co. beaches were always numbered.

As Gettison locked the warehouse door, he could hear the shuffling of uncertain feet on the other side of it, followed shortly by the pounding of great hands on the panels. Dire threats, muttered in a thick and heavy voice, accompanied the pounding, but Gettison calmly ignored them and walked leisurely toward the house again.

He climbed the stairs and, still betraying not the slightest sign of perturbation, strolled along the assistants' veranda to discover if, by any chance, the other two assistants who were credited to the Benin River factory were in their rooms. After his experience in the warehouse, he was frankly curious to learn what manner of men *they* were.

The two front rooms were empty. As he was leaving the second, however, he was startled by the whistling of a canary, or some such bird, coming suddenly from the third or rear bedroom. This was most unusual. Canaries were not found, as a rule, on Oil Rivers' trading-factories.

The door of the rear bedroom was open, and, without troubling to knock, he went in. The warbling stopped instantly.

In spite of himself, Gettison was surprized.

He saw a pair of popping blue eyes and a mouth that was built to order to fit a baby's pacifier. The rest of the face that confronted him was fiery red and the curly hair that crowned it all was almost vermillion. Something that looked like a magic lantern was hugged between a pair of fat, white flanneled knees.

"How do you do?" Gettison said politely. "My name is Gettison."

The rather stout young man rose slowly, depositing the thing that resembled a magic lantern on the table at his elbow.

"Harth," he announced with astonishing abruptness. "Kernel clerk. Just been out three months. Colt's gone up-river to Farquhar's Beach. Didn't expect you till tomorrow."

Then he offered Gettison a hand that did not grip, but swallowed.

"I see," Gettison commented dryly. "Colt, I assume, is the shop clerk?"

"Yes. Second trip. Nine months to go."

Gettison nodded, tried to glance casually around the room, but could not seem to get away from Harth's popping blue eyes.

"Thompson, the former agent, was invalided, wasn't he?"

"Yes. Blackwater. Pretty rocky. Hope he gets home. Fine fellow."

Again Gettison nodded, although he did not like to hear an agent being so familiarly referred to by a kernel clerk. Then, in a deliberate effort to make an impression upon Harth, he produced the intoxicated beach clerk's keys and dangled them in plain sight without being too ostentatious about it.

"Nice room you have here. I thought it was inhabited by a canary as I came along the hall. May I ask what that is?"

Harth's eyes were upon the keys. He knew those keys, having had occasion to

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wear them on his belt several times when the beach clerk, whose name was Logan, was unfit for duty.

"A magic lantern," he said indifferently in reply to Gettison's query. "Those are Logan's keys, aren't they?"

"A magic lantern!" Gettison exclaimed mildly, purposely ignoring Harth's reference to the keys. "What are you doing? Starting a Benin River mission?"

Harth did not answer. He was too intent upon the keys.

"Where did you find him when you took them away from him?"

Gettison frowned and became an agent in and from that moment.

"When I ask a question, Mr. Harth, I expect an answer. Tell Mr. Colt to report to me when he returns."

He turned sharply upon his heel and reached the door before Harth's softly modulated voice halted him.

"Better give me Logan's keys, Mr. Gettison. He'll be as ugly as a tarantula when he wakes up."

Gettison spun upon the other angrily. It did not please him to think Harth was so sure that Logan must have been asleep to permit him to deprive him of his keys.

"Mind your own —— business! I'll attend to Logan, drunk or sober."

Gettison left the room then, but Harth simply shrugged his shoulders and went back to his magic lantern.

His button mouth puckered as if he were going to resume his imitation of a song-bird, and the result was a shrill bird call that seemed to mock Gettison's authority and made him stop short in the hall until he heard a faint "Yessah!" come in answer from the galley. Evidently, that was only Harth's way of calling for his house-boy.

Gettison went on to his own quarters; two rooms on the other side of the house. He looked them over without any enthusiasm, criticized the monotonous bush-bound view from the veranda, studied the broad, swirling river that raced wildly past into the gray haze of the sea, considered the depraved condition of the beach, and decided that only the most drastic kind of discipline would produce the desired result.

Then, just as he was turning to deposit Logan's keys in a drawer of his desk, he found Harth almost at his elbow.

Gettison started. He was rattled. The popping blue eyes sticking out under the bright red thatch of hair irritated him, and though Harth walked on rubber-soled shoes, Gettison thought he moved altogether too quietly for a man of his size and weight.

"What do you want?" he barked impolitely.

"Logan's keys, if you'll let me have them. I sent my boy down to find out if——"

"To the —— with your boy and you, too. Go to your room and stay there till I ask for your assistance."

"My boy tells me that Logan is smashing things up in the store," Harth advised calmly. "He'll raise Cain when he gets out and I thought it best to get it over with."

Gettison was on the verge of asserting his independence and authority once more, but the fact that Logan was "smashing things up" could not be tolerated. So he compromised.

"Very well. I'll attend to him. I'll send for you if I need you."

Harth nodded.

"I'd better come with you," he said simply.

Gettison stopped. The sallow skin over his cheek-bones tightened perceptibly. His eyes narrowed and one became aware of the steel-wire foundation over which his veneer of lazy indifference was laid.

"I'll go down alone," he said, biting at the words. "This is my responsibility, not yours. I have already told you to mind your own business—to go to your room and stay there until I send for you. I think that is all for the present."

And to Gettison's continued surprize, Harth turned and walked away without offering as much as a syllable of objection. Apparently, too, the junior assistant did exactly as he was told; at least, he went along the assistant's veranda in the general direction of his room.

Gettison hesitated just a moment or two. Then, going to the head of the stairs leading down to the beach, he saw an excited group of Kroo-boys, augmented by a smattering of loitering native traders, gathered about the doors of the general warehouse.

He descended the stairs without haste, one step at a time, strode at the same pace toward the scene of the rumpus and completely ignored the headman's efforts to warn him to be careful. After the approved method of the heroic Northwest Mounted Police, he walked straight into the teeth of

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anger, found the right key, unlocked the arehouse door and, opening it just enough o allow him to enter, slipped quickly inside, ulling the door closed after him.

The Kroo-boys gasped, then broke into storm of excited chattering, and Gettison, ppreciating what their excitement indiated, permitted himself the luxury of a adowy smile.

Then an iron cooking-pot of sizable imensions struck him a heavy though lancing blow on the side of the head, rashed against the door behind him, and ropped to utter ruin on the concrete floor t his feet.

Gettison staggered sidewise and stopped nly when a hogshead of tobacco interfered ith his progress. Momentarily dazed, his nees wabbling under him, he leaned upon he hogshead gratefully.

The smile had vanished and the Krooboys outside had scattered. Logan, who ad come out from behind a barricade of argo cases, stood a scant three yards away ith an ax head in one hand and an eightnch cooking-pot in the other.

He was still under the influence of the randy he had absorbed and was yet a long vay from being in his sober senses, but he vas fully awake. His physical equilibrium vas hardly a whit disturbed, and, in the articular channel in which his mind ran at hat moment, he was more normal than Gettison.

He knew what he wanted to do and to ave. Gettison's head was still swimming, nd a thick trickle of blood showed behind is left ear and coursed slowly down his eck.

Logan looked him over out of bleared, ed-rimmed eyes. He was not merely big; e was huge, and there was little waste naterial in his hugeness. Gettison, pale, ean, esthetic, looked trivial in comparison.

"New agent, eh? Gettin' sparky in the irst minute? Huh! Never heard o' me efore, did you?"

Gettison tried to straighten up. But his legs refused to answer the telegraphed instructions from his brain. The stifling heat in the warehouse pressed down upon him as if his head were smothered in a blanket.

Logan laughed at him thickly and held out the cooking-pot in receptive fashion.

"You're too pretty to break up," he sneered. "Put the keys in the pot and we'll call it off."

Gettison stiffened as if some one had thrust a bar of iron down his back. He saw the ax head and the cooking-pot and the height and breadth of Logan quite plainly. There was no question about the big man having all the odds in his favor. Gettison had not a hundred to one chance of beating him, even though Logan had not bristled so convincingly with such effective artillery. Yet he said steadily enough:

"You have all the guns on your side of the fence at this moment. But this moment won't last very long. Don't forget that. And I haven't got the keys in any case. They're in the padlock, hanging on the hasp outside the door."

Logan grinned. He did not, as Gettison hoped he would, drop the ax head and the cooking-pot and excitedly rush to the door to see if the keys were where Gettison had indicated.

Backing cautiously toward the double door, he kicked one-half of it open with his heel, glanced quickly at the hasp and discovered that Gettison had lied.

"I ought to open your head for that," he said as if he were seriously thinking about it. "But, like as not, I wouldn't find anything inside it if I did."

Then lurching quickly toward Gettison again:

"Hand them over! Chuck 'em in that pot or I'll split you in two!"

Gettison realized that he had made a mistake. Also, that he was confronted with a man whose drunken rage could readily become murderous. There was a glint in Logan's eyes then that danced on the edge of madness.

The keys dropped into the cooking-pot with a sad, brassy rattle.

"All right," Gettison said, as if he admitted that the joke was against him. "Let's get out of here. I'm sweating like a paddle boy."

Logan's smile was twisted.

"Righto, Mr. Sparky! But a good sweat'll do you good."

He began backing to the door again, and Gettison's shaky limbs came to life and followed after. Just a step or two. Logan halted in the doorway angrily.

"Here! Where you goin'? Who said you would get out? Didn't I say a good sweat would do you good? All right. Sweat, you blighter! Sweat your ruddy carcass dry!"

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Gettison, suddenly galvanized into real action by the promise of ignominious defeat, leaped for the door. But Logan merely laughed, slipped outside and, dropping the ax head, slammed the door viciously in Gettison's face. And despite Gettison's best efforts to push it open, he just leaned against it and locked it without a great deal of trouble.

Then Logan hung the keys on the clip of his belt, picked up the ax head and, with a glance of jaunty defiance all about him, marched off toward the house in search of more worlds to conquer and possibly another drink.

There was not a Kroo-boy or a native in sight. Evidently they knew Logan in his present mood and were willing to concede to him all the room he wanted.

As he rounded the water tank at the corner of the house, however, a large, fat hand reached suddenly out of the tank's shadow and completely engulfed the back of his neck. The muzzle of a ridiculously small revolver in another equally large, fat hand sank inquisitively into his short-ribs.

He dropped the ax head and the cooking-pot as if he already had been shot.

"—— you, Harth——!"

"Shut up," Harth interrupted conversationally. "You're drunk and you're stupid anyway. I'll take the keys while you go on top and try to sleep like a gentleman."

The sudden alteration in Logan's demeanor was startling. He did look stupid. There was no fight left in him and he was trembling violently. Harth seemed to have a most disquieting effect upon him, and, of course, there was the muzzle of Harth's gun in his short-ribs.

"You're goin' to let him out," Logan whined, maudlinly. "What are you interferin' for? It's between him and me. He locked me up, and I locked him up. Let him sweat. What's it to you?"

Harth permitted him to whine, but saw to it that the much discussed keys changed hands again. Then, with equal deliberation, he escorted his large prisoner up-stairs and put him to bed.

Logan continued to protest against Harth's interference every step of the way, but he was content, apparently, to confine his protests to words. Not once did he attempt to bolt or in any way question the circumstance that Harth was the complete master of the situation.

He lay down in bed, mumbling to himself, and Harth stood over him for a little while, as if he were pondering what the next move ought to be.

"Want me to tie you up?" he barked suddenly.

Logan scurried to the back of the bed in great haste. His face was a study in an odd and deep-seated terror.

"No, Harth, no. I'll lie quiet. Sure as death. Don't tie me up, Harth. I'll lie quiet."

Harth did not seem to think the pitiful, sniveling sound of the big man's voice at all unusual. Nor did he continue to hold the threat of the revolver over him. He stuck the weapon in his belt and eyed Logan as a doctor might regard a patient whose case was difficult to diagnose.

"I'll lie quiet," Logan whimpered again, and the murder that Gettison had seen in his eyes had died out when the fear came in. "I'm gettin' better. I'm comin' round. Don't tie me up, Harth. Don't, for ——'s sake! I can't look 'em in the face after. I feel like a —— bush nigger when you tie me up. Where's Colt? He'll watch me. He's not afraid of me. How'd you like to be tied up like a kernel thief? How'd you like that? Sure as death, Harth, I'll lie quiet."

Logan began to cry. He sobbed hugely into his pillow, the great body of him shaking convulsively from head to heel.

After listening to it for a minute or two, Harth went down to the warehouse and unlocked the door.

"He's all right now, Mr. Gettison," he announced simply. "Gone to bed."

Gettison reeled dizzily out of the warehouse, looking almost as murderous as Logan had, and infinitely more dangerous because his fury was cold white. It was not pleasant for a man of Gettison's mold to feel as foolish as he did then.

"Where is he?" he snapped.

"In bed. That's a nasty cut. Better let me——"

"Go to the ——!"

"Thanks."

"What's that?"

Gettison whirled upon Harth livid with rage.

"I said, thank you, Mr. Gettison."

"Confound your impertinence——"

"Certainly. Your privilege. But I'd get that cut attended to if I were you."

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Just then, Gettison became aware of wildered Kroo-boys who had crawled om cover when Logan had gone up-stairs. ne of them was the headman and he was oticeably in possession of an ax head and 1 eight-inch pot.

"Put those back in the store," he ordered ie headman bruskly, then turned slowly Harth again, appraising him disparagngly, up and down and across, his eyes nally coming to rest on the little revolver at was stuck in Harth's belt.

"Fat little boys shouldn't play soldiers ith real firearms," he suggested in a silky, nooth voice. "When you close the store, ring Logan's keys—and that toy—to my ffice."

Harth grunted an order to the headman "make quick," and before Gettison had eached the top of the house stairs, Harth as almost at his heels. Gettison heard the urried step behind him and turned his ead.

"Go into my office," he ordered and went ight on.

Harth gave no heed. His right hand fell pon Gettison's shoulder just as the latter as on the point of entering Logan's room.

"Better leave him alone," Harth counseled quietly. "Can't do any good and hat cut——"

Gettison wrenched himself free and ripped ut an oath and a straight left for Harth's uffy jaw simultaneously. Harth moved is head just a little, laughed an absurd, inkling laugh, wrapped both arms about ettison in a clumsy appearing clinch and—hat was all.

"You're worse than Logan," he said eriously, his popping blue eyes as devoid f humor as those of a catfish. "Are we oing to waltz like this along to your office, r are you going to come to your senses and ry to walk like a man?"

Gettison swallowed several times. His rms were imprisoned in a bear-like hug nd his chest and ribs seemed to be caving n, all at the same time. Pride and anger ad made him forget the blood that was trickling down the back of his neck, but now, sick and dizzy and much weaker than he realized, he remembered it again.

Gettison came vaguely to the conclusion that he was making a fool of himself.

"Very well," he said in a voice that sounded foreign and distant.

Harth released him and Gettison staggered weakly against the veranda rail. A dragon-fly glinted brazenly in the sunlight a yard from his eyes, and then became so dull as to be almost black. Gettison straightened up with a jerk, politely refused Harth's offer of assistance and managed to reach his office door on his own feet.

Then the queer circles that were the color of a dragon-fly's wings, whirled faster and faster before his eyes, and darkness closed in upon every side.

Harth carried him the remainder of the distance to his bed.

IT WAS not a good beginning. Even Gettison admitted that. He kept the admission to himself, however, and profiting by a tumultuous experience, remained in his own quarters until his head was relieved of its swath of bandages and the doctor from Sapeli had removed the stitches.

In the interval he made no move to discipline Logan for his violent indiscretion.

Ordinarily, Logan would have been discharged and sent home second cabin, which was both disgraceful and disagreeable. Only army non-coms could afford to travel like that.

But Gettison knew perfectly well that, if he ordered Logan home, Logan would celebrate the occasion. And he was afraid to risk it, and equally afraid to admit his fear.

In other words, Gettison's first hour's experience with Logan had shaken him to his foundations. Nothing of the sort had ever happened to him before, and he had no wish to have it happen again.

Particularly on Marsden & Co.'s Benin River trading-factory. It was too far removed from the haunts of men and the law they made to admit of the usual methods of enforcing discipline upon incorrigibles.

This latter truth was made plain to Gettison every time he looked out of his office window or lounged upon the veranda under the squeaky slow-moving punkah. For, from these vantage points he saw nothing but the mangrove-bound river, the lazy, low-hanging mists lifting up and out of the swamps, trade canoes that labored heavily up-stream in the heat of the broiling sun, or others, less business-like, that loafed in the shadow of the bush.

Once a day perhaps a stern-wheeler went churning past to or from Sapeli, or a government launch would come screaming out of

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the creek that led to Warri and Forcados. But that was all.

Farquhar's Beach was too far up-river to be companionable or to serve as a sort of moral force. Besides, Farquhar was an "independent" and independent traders did not enjoy the confidence or official approval of Marsden & Co.'s agents.

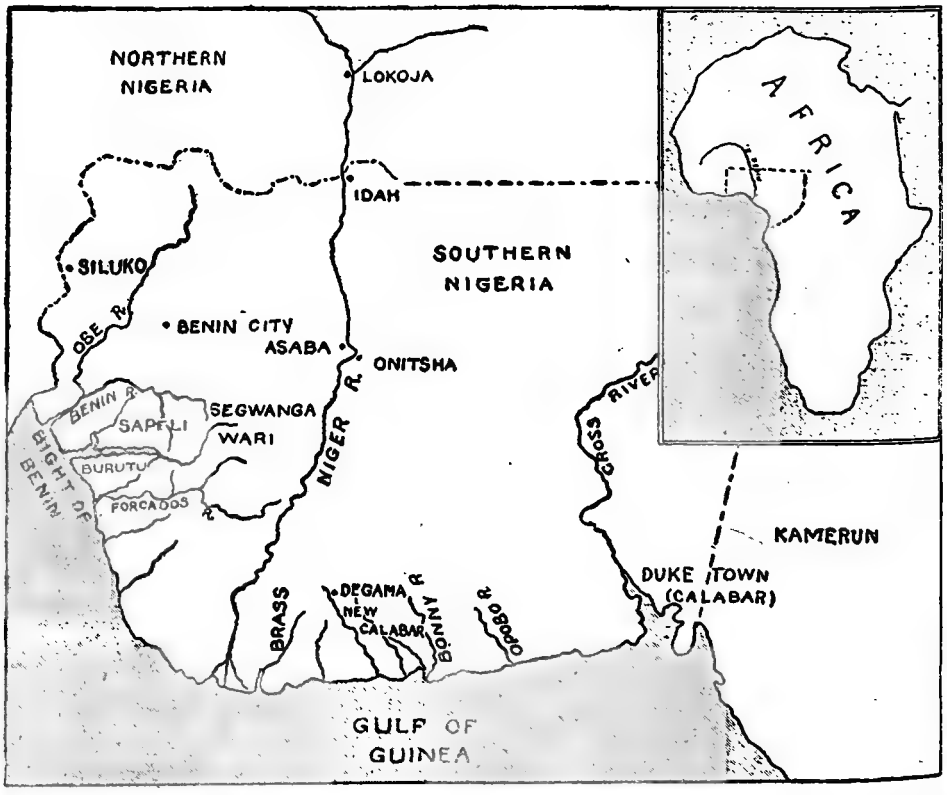
So that there seemed, from Gettison's standpoint, but one possibility to look forward to; that of ultimately having to handle Logan through the medium of firearms, just as Harth had done; and Gettison could find

irritated him beyond words, but nothing more than that.

One result of all this was that Gettison, unlike the majority of mortals, was glad when he looked upon Colt, his senior assistant, for the first time.

No one bothered very much about Colt at first glance, and quite a number of people had continued in the same frame of mind afterward.

He was a gray-faced, quiet-voiced, neutral little man, who listened respectfully to everything Gettison had to say and replied



no precedent in his experience for disciplinary demonstration of that sort.

Certainly, he had never heard of an agent shooting an assistant. It wasn't done.

He worried over it; lay awake thinking about it, pictured how, when and where it would happen, tried to justify it in every way, if it did, and actually decided about three o'clock one morning, that it would be better to have Colt as a witness than Harth.

Curiously enough, Gettison was not afraid of Harth; not physically. The kernel clerk

to his questions as if he were afraid the answers would not be the correct ones.

"The beach," Gettison took occasion to inform him toward the end of the second week, "is in a disreputable condition. I want to see a considerable change in that direction before the month is out."

"Er—yes—shall I tell Logan about it, sir?"

"Of course! What do you suppose I'm mentioning it for? How often does Logan go off on those—er—tangents of his?"

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"Not very often," Colt lied loyally. "He'll go along for weeks, sir, and——"

"All right. Tell him he's on probation—no, never mind. Wouldn't do any good in any case. Never does with fellows of his sort."

"Very good, sir. I'll just tell him about the condition of the beach."

"Hunh! I should imagine you'd have had sense enough to think of it yourself before I arrived. You were in charge, weren't you, when Thompson was invalided?"

Colt looked frightened. He tried to moisten his dry lips with a dryer tongue and looked everywhere at once. Gettison's expression tightened austerely.

"I haven't been—very well—lately," Colt said in apologetic hesitation.

"What's the trouble?" bruskly. "Malaria? Doctor attending you?"

Colt nodded and Gettison knew that the little man lied. His eyes narrowed.

"Plus the native villages?" he suggested with a thin, knowing smile.

Colt's head snapped back as if Gettison had struck him. Then he fumbled with his hands and talked haltingly down to them.

"No—no, sir. My little boy—about a month ago the letter came—died—pneumonia—never had a chance—and I——"

Colt blinked, squared his thin shoulders and almost barked at Gettison—"Is there anything else you have to say to me?"

Gettison hurriedly became interested in a letter that lay on his desk. It was from the home office and he knew its contents by heart. They had nothing whatever to do with Colt.

"Er—no. Not at present. I'm sorry about the boy. —— shame."

He gripped Colt's hand suddenly, put an arm about his shoulders and walked with him to the office door.

"Tell Harth I want him, will you?"

Colt nodded and stumbled blindly along the veranda. Gettison pursed his lips thoughtfully and went back to his desk. He thought Colt was a nice little chap.

And having decided that morning that there was something, out of the great heap of his experience, that he ought to say to Harth, Gettison now thought that he might as well be pleasant about it.

However, as he waited for Harth to appear, he heard a sound that indicated the presence of a carefree canary somewhere in the vicinity of the kernel store, and a minute later two popping blue eyes, under a thatch of glaring red hair, came into the room.

"You sent for me?" Harth inquired mildly.

Gettison then knew that it was going to be impossible for him to be pleasant to Harth. He could not impress him, or bully him, or hurt him, or understand him, or respect him. Therefore, being human, he detested him.

So he paid no attention to Harth until he had read the home office letter all over again. A Kroo-boy steward entered with a drink Gettison had ordered, and afforded another grateful reason for delay. Then, when the boy had gone out again, Gettison casually observed that Harth existed.

"You have a revolver which, I believe, you stick in your belt now and then," he began, speaking concisely and as if he were talking to a schoolboy. "Firearms, Mr. Harth, are quite unnecessary out here among traders. We have never had to resort to that kind of persuasion except in extraordinary cases and we find that our assistants are better off without them. Bring the revolver to me, please, and I'll take care of it for you. That's the safest way."

Harth did not laugh. He was as serious as an owl. Gettison would have appreciated the humor of his expression if he had not been so busily engaged in disliking him.

"I never use it on the blacks," Harth said unequivocally. "Only Logan."

Gettison winced.

"I see. Well, the next time you have to use it for Logan's benefit, you can come to me and get it. Bring it in and put it on my desk, will you?"

Harth's eyes stuck out a little farther.

"My own property," he offered heavily, mopping his face and neck. "Might as well ask me to deliver up my pajamas."

Gettison felt weak. He wanted time to think. Ten days before he would have blundered pompously on. Now, because of the thing Logan had done to him, he paused.

"Very well," picking up a paper-weight nervously and laying it down again. "I'll take the matter up with the home office." Then stubbornly. "I don't like your attitude, Harth. Don't like it at all. There may be some excuse for Logan, but there is

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none for you. You are insubordinate, impertinent, an irreconcilable, and you'll find, as time goes on, that that kind of thing does not pay. You may go."

Harth turned obediently to leave the office. Then Gettison had another truculent thought.

"Why did you import that magic lantern?"

"To show the natives some pictures," Harth said, coming about something after the fashion of a cargo boat swinging with the tide.

"Hm. Quite benevolent. Mission pictures, I assume?"

"Just scenery and things."

"I see." Gettison smiled a superior smile. "All right. I have no objection to that."

He turned his back upon Harth and strolled into his bedroom.

Harth's expression did not change. He returned to the kernel store, opened it up for business again, and, to all appearances, put Gettison completely out of his thoughts.

During the late afternoon lull in trade, Logan slouched quietly into the store on his way from the oil-yard to the main wharf. He did not seem so big when he was sober. His shoulders sagged, his arms hung loosely, his eyes looked as harmless as those of a sheep.

"'Lo, Harth," he said tonelessly, and helped himself to one of the kernel clerk's cigarets, contained in a tin on the desk. "Did Gettison say anything to you about me?"

"No," shortly.

"He told Colt to tell me to clean up the beach."

"Don't blame him. Looks a wreck."

Logan nodded sadly. Minus the aid of alcohol, he was as spineless as an oyster.

"He hasn't said a word to me since it happened," he complained without any life in his voice. "Not a word. Maybe he's gettin' ready to send me up into the bush? Do you think he's goin' to do that, Harth?"

Obviously, Logan was desperately afraid of a mahogany concession assignment and was willing to do almost anything to avoid it. It was a pitilessly lonely life.

"Don't know," Harth said unsympathetically and, in the same breath, ordered some small bushel traders to take their raucous squabbling about their "pay" elsewhere. "Clean up the beach. Keep sober. Maybe he'll condescend to talk to you then."

Logan's eyes lighted up for a moment with a gleam of hope. But only for a moment. They became lifeless again as he scuffed his heavy way out of the store, the embodiment of hopeless dejection and defeat.

He was hurt because the new agent had not spoken to him. And in the far places, where men of one's own color are few, being ignored as carefully and completely as Gettison ignored Logan, matters very much to sensitive and repentant souls.

Logan was both. Also, knowing that he did not deserve any consideration at Gettison's hands, his huge body trembled in fear of Gettison's just revenge.

It would have interested Gettison to know that Logan was even more afraid of him than he was of Logan.

THOUGH the manner in which Gettison concealed his daily—almost hourly—fear of another outbreak on Logan's part, was creditable enough, he was not in command of Marsden & Co.'s Benin River trading-factory in the few short weeks that followed.

Even if he did take his place at the head of the dining-table and continued studiously to ignore his gigantic beach clerk, who sat upon his left hand, Gettison knew that Logan was, virtually, the deciding voice in the matter.

And Logan, with his eyes fixed stolidly on his plate, was a mountain of silence. He was a disturbed mountain, too; and whether shuffling around the sun-baked beach, moping sadly in the oil-yard, sulking in his own room at night or borrowing Harth's cigarets and sympathy, Logan could almost hear the proverbial coals of fire sizzling upon his head, as the days and weeks passed by.

Gettison had not transferred him, nor had he sent him home!

Therefore, Logan, who was of a grateful mold, lived in terror of "breaking out" again. He did not want to break out. He wanted Gettison to speak to him!

Gettison, of course, was not aware of this, and since he paid no attention to Harth, except to issue instructions to him as if he were a lackey, he deprived himself of the opportunity to become acquainted with the true facts of the case.

Then, on the evening of a day when a cargo

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steamer came into the river and emptied the kernel store of its tonnage of palm-oil kernels, Harth gave a magic lantern performance in the empty store for the edification of the Kroo-boys and any near-by natives who cared to accept his free-for-all invitation to attend.

Many of them did and Harth, as solemn as a church warden, threw pictures on a bed sheet with unerring aim.

His audience, squatting in uneven rows upon the dusty kernel store floor, jabbered in excited whispers as they looked gapingly up at—

Hyde Park in Winter,
The Black Watch Marching Down Princess Street, Edinburgh,
The Flatiron Building,
Chief Rain-in-the-Face,
The Pool of London,
The Scotch Express,
Eiffel Tower,
Eskimos Fishing Through the Ice,

and many other things of which they had never dreamed and did not comprehend, in spite of Colt's eloquent explanations, worded in a smattering of three native jargons, augmented by pidgin English.

Harth was not bothered by any desire to do a great good. He was simply "showing the natives some pictures," and spending the evening.

Colt, however, began to stand on his toes and expand his chest after a while, and his attitude became distinctly professorial before he had finished explaining what snow was—the principal feature of the Hyde Park picture.

Logan, who towered on the side-lines to keep order, first became retrospective, then homesick, then sentimental.

He remembered poignantly the days when he used to attend magic lantern performances. He had been a member of a juvenile temperance organization known as The Band of Hope, and he chose to recall, with painful distinctness, a song that began:

"Father, dear father, come home with me now,
The clock in the steeple's struck one."

Logan saw it all over again. He saw the poor barefooted little girl who was the heroine of the story, shivering fearfully outside the door of the public house where her intoxicated father spent his evenings, and he remembered what a brute he thought her father was.

Just such a brute as he was now, he conceded in the true spirit of repentance.

Logan slipped out of the kernel store and stood alone beneath the stars. Vague shapes of canoes drifted down river in the silver light of the moon, and the watch-boy's three-lined dirge seemed to have a more mournful note in it than usual.

And Gettison—Logan gulped at the thought—Gettison would not speak to him!

He would speak to a Kroo-boy or a Jakri or even the bushiest of bush Sobo, but not to *him*.

Logan lifted his head a little, looked and felt very sorry for himself, then suddenly turned in the direction of Gettison's quarters. There was a light there and Logan headed for it in a dumb kind of resolve that was born of a flash of indignation and a groping desire to be as good as other men were.

Gettison was seated on his veranda looking out upon the river.

When he heard Logan's step on the stairs, he sat a little straighter in his chair. He knew that step because it concealed nothing of Logan's lumbering heaviness, and when it turned in his direction, instead of going the other way, Gettison reached his feet without being aware of it until he felt his legs shaking under him.

He did not know in advance what he was going to do, and in the interval of seconds accorded to him, he could not think coherently of anything except that his revolver and rifle were in his bedroom.

Then Logan was standing at the corner of the veranda trying to hold up his head and look apologetic and repentant at the same time.

"I—I just came up—" he began haltingly and stopped.

Gettison's throat was dry. He was not sure whether Logan was drunk or not, but, being Gettison, he tried to protect his dignity first and his body afterward.

"What do you want?" he rasped sharply, though to him it sounded like a hoarse whisper. "I didn't send for you."

"No—but—I just came up to—to say——"

"Get out!"

Gettison hardly heard the sound of his own voice, but to Logan the order was a roar of rage.

He stopped. The courage that had brought him there oozed out of him like

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water out of a paper bag. He stared at Gettison stupidly, then turned his great body around and shuffled tremblingly away.

Even then Gettison did not understand it. He spent the remainder of the evening in his office with a carefully loaded revolver in the drawer of his desk.

LOGAN "broke out" at exactly 2:04 a. m.

Gettison knew this because, when the sound of the shot awakened him, the clock on the little table by his bedside told him the time.

He sat upon the edge of his bed quaking and cold. Just then he did not know whether Logan had fired the shot or not, but he had no difficulty imagining that the beach clerk had been the cause of it.

Then, as he was reluctantly drawing a pair of trousers over his pajamas with hands that visibly shook, Harth came into the bedroom and announced tersely:

"Logan's out again. And he's out for blood this time. Never knew him to take a revolver with him before. Something must have made him crazier than usual. Can you shoot?"

Gettison tugged his trousers on savagely.

"Who the —— do you think you're talking to?"

Harth shrugged his shoulders. He had been awakened from a deep and grateful sleep. And Logan was out shooting at things. Harth was not disposed to go groping through a thesaurus in search of the right words.

"Well, if you can't shoot, better stay where you are. Because Logan can."

This was sheer impertinence and it had the desired effect. It made Gettison furiously angry, woke him up and induced him to display greater speed.

Harth paid no attention to what Gettison said, but when the latter lifted a repeating rifle down from its place on the wall, examined it in nervous haste to be sure that it was loaded, and hurried into his office to remove the revolver from the drawer of his desk, Harth said out of a solemn calm that gave no hint of humor:

"Quite an arsenal. Going to play soldiers in real earnest tonight, aren't we?"

Gettison writhed. He felt, in that moment, that there was nothing in the world more futile than the vaunted authority which the Benin River Agency gave him.

Something had slipped away from him—his grip upon himself, perhaps—and, with Logan on the war-path he could feel himself sinking, sinking, sinking——

He did not answer Harth's sarcasm. He knew what Harth thought of him; that there was nothing but amusement in the kernel clerk's attitude toward him. So, biting upon the bullet of his galling impotence, he held his peace and allowed Harth to lead the way out on to the veranda.

Colt, in his pajamas and native-made slippers, stood at the head of the stairs waiting for them. He, also, had unearthed a revolver from the forgotten depths of his uniform case, and was handling it as if he did not know what to do with it.

"I think he has taken to the bush, sir," he told Gettison nervously.

"Think!" Gettison almost screamed the word. He knew he had Colt where he wanted him. "Don't you *know?* Where's the watch-boy?"

"Still running, probably," Harth offered simply. "Come on, or we'll have to hang Logan for murder."

Probably because Colt was present, Gettison drew himself up and said with a weak semblance of authority:

"Look here, Harth, I am the agent on this factory and I'll give all the instructions that are necessary."

Harth leaned against a veranda upright. "All right," he agreed amicably and waited.

Gettison moistened his lips, glanced furtively into the shadows under the kernel store awning, then off toward the back beach creek and the black blanket of the bush beyond it. There was cover for Logan everywhere, and Gettison had learned that the big beach clerk's brain operated many times faster and much more craftily when he was drunk than it did when he was sober.

"You have no idea of the direction he took?" he asked Colt bruskly to cover his nervousness.

"Not exactly, sir. I thought I saw him cross the beach over there—" Colt indicated the general direction of the oil-wharf and the bush—"but I can't be sure he stayed there. He may have sneaked back and——"

A scream of terror came out of the silence beyond the kernel store and left Colt's mouth gaping. A tremendous bellow of rage echoed it. This was followed by the rush of several naked feet, a series of heavy

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splashes, two shots in rapid succession and then a laugh that chilled.

After that came a sobbing sort of quiet that spread itself like a pall all over the beach and the river.

"Well, we know where he is," Harth said carelessly. "S'long."

He went down-stairs, three at a time, as soft-footed as any bush cat.

And Gettison lived a lifetime in the succeeding few minutes.

As he followed Harth's lead, he had no ideas of his own. The thing he had dreaded was upon him, and remembering Logan's cold-blooded blow with the cooking-pot, he knew that he was not stalking a drunken fool who was fiddling with a revolver that might go off.

He was hunting a man who would shoot with much malice aforethought if he saw him first.

Then Harth slipped under the kernel store awning. It was filled with shadows in there, and Gettison paused behind the first of the round ironwood supports of the awning and peered after Harth to see what he meant to do.

He did not know that Colt had gone pattering off in the direction of the other end of the store to circle the building and try to take Logan in the rear; nor did he realize, in spite of his assumption of authority at the head of the stairs, that he was allowing his assistants to take all the initiative.

There was not a trace of the braggadocio he had displayed in that memorable first hour of his acquaintance with the Benin River factory. Though it was reasonable to assume, in an adventure of the kind, that he could shoot faster and straighter than either Colt or Harth, he showed no disposition to prove it. He even held his rifle like a novice, and crouched behind the ironwood post, shivering so violently that it was almost audible.

It is nowhere good for a man to lose control of his nerves. In the tropics, it is disastrous.

And when, from behind a rain barrel that stood on the back creek corner of the kernel store, there came a bellow that filled the night with a low thunder, Gettison went cold to the very roots of him.

"Edge, you swine, edge!" Logan screamed and, firing around the rain barrel, planted a bullet in the ironwood post behind which Gettison was crouching.

Gettison heard the ugly chug and rip of it, on a level with his throat, and jumped back several feet. Whereupon, Logan laughed and let him have another that struck the trailing butt of his rifle and spun it neatly out of his hand.

"Duck, you —— fool!" Harth yelled from the shadows and flung a shot at the rain barrel to distract Logan's attention.

Gettison did not duck. At least, not as Harth intended that he should.

In that moment, he lost all sense of time and place and sensation and circumstance. As if he had suddenly been deprived of the power of thought and the sight of his eyes, he became little better than an automaton—a sort of mechanical toy that was obeying the dictates of its mechanism when wound up.

That mechanism was instinct; and, in Gettison, the dominant instinct was pride. All his life, pride had been his mainstay, even when the flesh had cringed from the fight, so that the prideful thing to do had become as mechanical as the lifting of an arm or the moving of a foot.

Logan's third bullet ripped Gettison's trousers leg just above the knee, but he gave as little heed to that as he gave to Harth's repeated admonition to duck.

In a gray-black haze he deliberately walked the few steps to his fallen repeater, stooped, picked it up and, mechanically flinging it to his shoulder, fired at the rain barrel.

A second later something burned dully under his armpit, but he walked forward a few yards in Logan's direction and fired again—two shots this time; trotted several more yards and fired once more.

He did not know that Logan was feverishly reloading or that Harth, gasping at such suicidal tactics as Gettison was exhibiting, was at the same time taking every advantage of it by creeping rapidly up to the rain barrel on his stomach.

Gettison knew nothing, felt nothing and saw only the outer bilge of the rain barrel. And steadily advancing a few yards at a time, he fired at that with the uncanny persistence and precision of a man gone mad over a single theory or theme.

Logan's shooting had "gone wild." There was something devastating about Gettison's steady advance in the open—standing up. The nearer he drew, the harder he seemed to be to hit.

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Nevertheless, one of Logan's bullets finally found him, with all the force of a sledge-hammer, a little below the left shoulder.

Gettison staggered drunkenly, the rifle dropped from his hands and he sank to his knees something less than five yards from his objective.

Logan's next shot clipped his ear, but Gettison tugged at the revolver in his belt, swayed as if he would fall, fired through a blackness that was pin-pricked with tiny spots of light, then dragged himself, with appalling inevitability, nearer to the rain barrel.

Harth slid around the other side of it swiftly.

Logan became vaguely aware of the kernel clerk's fat shadow and of Colt's darting little figure descending upon him from the rear at one and the same time, and, uttering a frightened scream, he lunged madly away from them—outward.

There was the waspish sound of a revolver shot from Gettison's side of the barrel, and a gurgling, coughing gasp from Logan, as he teetered forward upon his toes to slide heavily upon his face.

And then there came a sound like a long drawn sigh of relief.

Harth waited a moment or two. He was as cool and as calm as an undertaker, and he knew that there was something approximating a madman on the other side of that rain barrel. Colt shivered, and huddled behind Harth's generous bulk like a small boy on the outer edge of a crowd.

Then Harth went around the barrel cautiously on the inside.

But there was no more shooting.

Gettison lay, just as Logan did, flat upon his face, unmoving. The only material difference in their respective positions was that the top of Logan's head was pointed in a retreating direction, while Gettison's was aimed forward.

Also, Gettison's right arm was outstretched and the muzzle of his revolver leaned possessively against the bottom hoop of the rain barrel.

THERE were no further casualties. Whoever had been the butt of Logan's playful marksmanship behind the kernel store had escaped without injury.

Gettison and Logan went home on the same steamer.

Aside from the bullet in his shoulder, Gettison had been nipped four times. Logan had a furrow along the back of his right hand that must have interfered considerably with his shooting, and Gettison's last shot had found the big man full in the chest.

As Harth remarked when he commandeered the services of a Sapeli-bound launch next morning and took his patients to the doctor, instead of waiting for the doctor to come to them:

"The score's about even. And they're both crazy."

Later, after they had been safely transferred to a homebound steamer at Forcados, Harth sat in Colt's room one night because Colt felt the need of companionship.

"What was your opinion of Gettison?" Harth asked.

"Of course, I didn't see what he did," Colt declared cautiously. "But I—er—never would have thought it of him."

"No? Why?"

"Well, he was too bombastic—too much of a bully—at least, that was how I found him."

"Bully, eh? Not Gettison. He was only rattled. New. Didn't know men or the meaning of responsibility. And Logan knocked him silly in the first minute. So, my son, he took it out on you."

"I see," Colt said, but he didn't; and, after a pause, argued stubbornly—"But if Gettison was rattled—well, men in that state of mind don't, as a rule, walk into other men's revolver muzzles as though they were out for a stroll."

"No, not as a rule," Harth agreed. "But that doesn't mean anything. Think of me, Colt. Of *me!* As a general thing, would any one suspect me of putting The Leaning Tower of Pisa into a magic lantern for the benefit of abysmal ignorance in a loin-cloth!"

Colt laughed, and Harth, to sooth his troubled spirit, became a blackbird on a bough.

LOGAN did not go to jail when he reached Liverpool.

Gettison would not let him.

And when Gettison "took over" the Sapeli factory about six months later and found himself in need of a shop clerk, he asked for Harth.

Suggesting that though a good man can lose his head, it is always a better one who finds it again.

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Pay Gravel

A Four-Part Story

Conclusion

by

Hugh Pendexter

Author of "Lost Diggings," "The White Dawn," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

IN AUGUST of 1876, when the gold-rush to the Black Hills of Nebraska was at its height, Peter Dinsdale with some companions from the East started out over the long trail which led to Deadwood City, the boom town of the moment.

The Cheyenne and the Sioux were on the war-path, and Dinsdale's companions, alarmed by the stories of atrocities, decided to turn back. Dinsdale continued on alone. Half-way out he met "San Juan" Joe, a gambler, returning to Deadwood City, and they joined forces. San Juan warned Dinsdale that if they could win their way through the "Gate of Hell," a cañon where the Indians lay in ambush, they would be comparatively safe.

They started through the cañon at dawn. Before they had gone far they heard screams ahead of them. Spurring their horses forward, they met a girl, running and stumbling, her hands outstretched. Ahead the Indians were dancing about the victims of their latest massacre—the seventh since May.

Dinsdale caught the girl up on his saddle and they dashed forward. Surprized by the white men, the Indians put up a poor defense, finally withdrawing, leaving five of their number dead.

Still shaken with terror, the girl—she was only seventeen—told Dinsdale that her name was Lottie Carl, and that the party she had been with were friends of hers, but that she had no relatives.

Going forward again, they passed through several camps, abandoned for the richer diggings at Deadwood. The streets of Deadwood were filled with a mob of men and women, who called out asking for news of the troops. The Indians were getting bolder, and the miners hardly dared leave the protection of the town.

"Let's take Lottie to Kitty the Schemer," suggested San Juan. "She'll take care of her."

Dinsdale did not like Kitty's house. The furniture and Kitty herself, exquisitely dressed and beautiful, suggested the character of the place she ran. "I've decided that Lottie can't stay here," he said abruptly. "We'll take her to the Widow Colt's up the street. That's decent."

Kitty was furious.

"Kill him, San Juan," she begged. "If you loved me you would!"

But San Juan had too much respect for Dinsdale as a man and a fighter, and he realized that Dinsdale would never become a rival for Kitty.

"I wish it hadn't happened," he said as they left. "You've made a dangerous enemy in Kitty."

Dinsdale's entrance to the life of Deadwood City seemed destined to be stormy. Later on he intervened in a barroom brawl to save a man called "Scissors" from bully Allen. Scissors, a harmless fellow who was considered weak-minded since his escape from the Indians, amused the crowd and made a living by cutting clever silhouettes out of paper.

As Dinsdale forced the bully toward the door at the point of his six-gun he knew that he had made another and more dangerous enemy.

"I'll go around to San Juan Joe's and gamble a bit," he decided a moment later. "I have certainly busted into Deadwood society with a bang."

AS THE days passed Dinsdale established himself in the opinion of the town as a bad-man. No scrape was too wild for him to be involved in. At one sitting he lost three thousand dollars to "French Curly" and another time offered to cut a deck of cards for a thousand dollars a cut. In a saloon fight he shot a man's gun along the floor.

As he always paid his losses in greenbacks in a town where "dust" was common currency, suspicion was soon aroused. San Juan Joe told him frankly:

"You'd better get out of town for a while. People think you are the robber who pulled the Ogalala hold-up."

Dinsdale refused, but San Juan protested:

"I've had a confidential report that Jim Omaha, the famous railroad detective, is coming here. If there were any questions I didn't care to answer I'd clear out. That's my advice; take it or leave it."

Dinsdale was shaken.

"Perhaps I'd better go," he muttered.

About this time several mysterious men, known

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to each other only as One, Two, Three, Four and Six, were meeting in the darkened back room of a Chinese wash-house, discussing in guarded tones their plans for a new hold-up; more spectacular than any before. Five, who had proved unreliable, must be replaced, and the chief assured them that he thought he knew the right man.

In the meanwhile Kitty the Schemer, incensed because Dinsdale had spurned her, and more dangerous than any man, was inciting the town against him. The result was that he was obliged to kill "Bandy" Allen in self-defense, in a running fight. That night Dinsdale fled from the town with Iron Pyrites, a prospector, fearing mob-law.

While they were prospecting through the hills, Dinsdale stumbled on an abandoned cabin and, exploring it, found that it was the rendezvous of horse-thieves. Trapped in the cellar, he was obliged to stun one of the returning men with his revolver-butt in order to make his escape.

"We'll have to make tracks for Rapid City," warned Pyrites on rejoining him. "If they catch us we'll hang, if they don't shoot us down first."

AT RAPID CITY they went to Calvin's Bar and Dinsdale began cutting cards with a man whose head was bandaged. Luck was with him and he soon had won all the other man's money.

"How did you hurt your head?" asked Dinsdale.

"Think I'm a newspaper?" said the man smiling frostily. "Play cards."

Scissors came into the room and circulated about cutting pictures. Soon he worked over to Dinsdale and seeing that he was unobserved whispered:

"San Juan Joe wants you to return to Deadwood City with me at once. The situation has cleared up and he has a job for you."

Dinsdale prepared to leave, but before he left he warned Pyrites who was leaning over the bar, drunk and noisy:

"Look out for that man with the bandage. I'm almost sure he is the man I hit yesterday."

On the trail back to Deadwood they were nearly ambushed by the horse-thieves, led by the bandaged man, and it was only Scissors' cunning that saved them from capture.

While looking for hostile smoke-signals on top of Mato tipi, the sacred mountain of the Indians, they were captured by a band of red men led by Little Big Horse, and again it was only Scissors' Indian talk and a pretense he made of sacrificing to the Indian god before the hostiles realized they had been seen, that saved them from instant death. They were taken to the Indian camp and bound, while messengers were dispatched to Crazy Horse, scouting through the mountains, for advice.

Nothing could hold Scissors. Time and again he slipped out of the rawhide thongs and, concealing them, called the Indians to witness that his medicine was very strong.

Crazy Horse arrived and a battle of rival medicines was arranged between Scissors and Sorrel Horse, a medicine-man. Marvelous tricks of sleight-of-hand, disappearing cards, and knives that stabbed without making wounds, were performed. The Indian was completely outclassed. Crazy Horse was mystified and he feared to kill his captives.

"We will move on to our permanent camp while I send messengers north to Lone Wolf, whose friends these white men claim to be," he decided. "Then if they have lied they shall die beneath the skinning-knives of our young men. I have spoken."

"Cheer up," whispered Scissors to Dinsdale. "I haven't lived among the Indians for nothing, and we are not dead yet. I'll get you out of this scrape before the messengers return."

CHAPTER X

THE WHITE MEN SCORE

BECAUSE of a heavy rain the Slim Butte village was not reached until the close of the third day out from Prospect Valley. The clouds broke and the afternoon sun shone warm as the Ogalala and their prisoners came in sight of the village.

That they were expected was proven by the exodus of men, women, children and many dogs rushing down the long slope to meet them. With whoops and howls warriors and squaws pressed toward the prisoners, brandishing knives and voicing awful threats. Crazy Horse sternly ordered these people to fall back and not to annoy the white men, and further announced it was not yet known whether they were enemies or friends.

As they rode up the slope to the village the prisoners counted thirty-seven lodges besides four uncovered frames. One lodge, much larger than the others, had a tall pole standing beside the entrance, to which was attached a long strip of flannel heavily fringed with feathers.

At less than a man's height there was suspended a large rattle which bore a turtle design.

Dinsdale assumed this was the lodge of Crazy Horse until Scissors informed him the chief was extremely democratic and that this particular shelter belonged to a military society, organized by Sitting Bull, and known as the Strong Hearts. The dwelling lodges were largely occupied by families that had run away from the Spotted Tail Agency.

They were under the direct command of American Horse, who was absent on a scout to the head of Heart River. The warriors who served as Crazy Horse's bodyguard, like the great number of his northern hostiles, had never lived on a reservation, and never intended to.

American Horse had left word for Crazy

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forse that Sitting Bull would soon be on he Little Missouri, or the Heart, with five housand braves, and that the combined orces would descend on the Black Hills and ripe out all the settlements before the soliers could arrive from the Big Horn country. Crazy Horse, although a stoic in concaling his feelings, was much pleased over he likelihood of an early joining of forces. Ie ordered that the prisoners be conducted o a lodge and well guarded but not bound.

The hard travel and the fare of jerked neat had told more severely on Dinsdale han on his companion, and the former was lad to throw himself on a pile of robes and uccumb to the luxury of complete relaxaion. Scissors was more worried because of he danger threatening the hill settlements han he cared to admit, and he remained at he opening of the lodge in a hope of learnng something definite.

No messenger had arrived from the Short Medicine Pole Hills, and until one arrived ie would not believe Sitting Bull was with-n smoke-signal distance of the Little Missouri. Dinsdale was too exhausted mentally and physically to anticipate the dangers of the morrow. Scissors's heart beat rapidly every time he heard a pony's hoof drumming toward the village.

They fared royally that night, as the village was overflowing with food. Their supper consisted of a buffalo tongue, dried meat pounded and mixed with wild plums and cherries, a large bowl of dried buffalo berries and another of fresh cherries. Water was brought them in a jug that once held whisky and was now a trophy of a wagon-train raid.

This welcome change of diet aroused Dinsdale from his apathy and he ate like a wolf. Untanned buffalo robes formed their beds and against the sides of the lodge were piled bundles of antelope skins. A McClellan saddle, finished in black leather, reminded them of the Little Big Horn tragedy. Scissors sadly commented, "I don't believe there's a village north of the Platte that hasn't some spoils taken at the Custer fight."

No guards were posted inside the lodge, and for the first time since their capture both were free of bonds. They were so weary they slept through the ordinary bustle of early morning and did not awaken until disturbed by the penetrating sound of rattles. Dinsdale rolled from his robes before fully awake and groped about for some weapon. Scissors quieted him and opened the flap and peered out. He motioned for Dinsdale to join him, and whispered:

"Some ceremony of the Strong Hearts. I can see their banner."

Dinsdale was not assured, for the first part of the spectacle he observed consisted of two men with bows and arrows. Behind them walked two braves, each vigorously shaking a gourd rattle. Ahead of the quartette walked two girls; one carrying a pipe and the other a Strong Heart banner. The purpose of the bowmen was soon revealed, and Dinsdale lost his fear. One of the men suddenly raised his bow and sent an arrow through a dog. His companion shot another; and the rattles were shaken loudly to signalize their marksmanship.

A woman ran from a lodge and took both dogs inside. The little procession disappeared behind a lodge and presumably killed more dogs as there came further spasmodic rattling. After some fifteen minutes the men and the two young girls came in sight of the prisoners' lodge and walked toward it. The bows were unstrung and the rattles sounded only at regular intervals. The four men chanted:

Friends, whoever runs away shall not be admitted.

"Strong Hearts all right. They've been shooting their breakfast. Food enough without killing dogs, but they are trying to teach the village folks self-control. They won't shoot a dog if the owner comes out and makes a fuss," explained Scissors, who was now cutting a piece of paper. "They reckon it makes a man's heart strong to see his dog killed without making a row about it. There comes the woman who owned the two pups we saw shot. She showed her self-control by taking the dogs inside and singeing them. Now she's carrying them to the society's lodge where they'll be cooked and eaten. In the old days there might be as many as four Strong Heart lodges in one village; and it took some dogs to keep them all going."

As the Strong Hearts proudly stalked by the prisoners' lodge Scissors leaned through the opening and thrust his picture into the hand of a bowman. It was an excellent outline of a brave in the act of releasing an arrow, and the low grunt of the recipient testified to his appreciation of it.

"Always could do it," mused Scissors

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proudly. "I'm *wakan*. Pictures don't cost me anything. Cheers them up. Why not give them some?"

"If it'll cheer the —— devils any please give them a bushel," was Dinsdale's disconsolate rejoinder. "Scissors, I'm losing my nerve; and I never lost it before. It isn't death; it's the way they have with their —— skinning-knives. I'm always remembering that story about the fellow skinned alive and Rawhide Creek being named after the affair."

"You're borrowing trouble," rebuked Scissors. "The fellow you mention suffered enough without you suffering any over it. Almost any morning the dogs in this village see some of their canine friends shot. Do they worry and brood over what may happen to them? See! Two are out there playing now. Today is theirs and they live it. Wakantanka lets them see only the present. Man sees a long line of tomorrows. Unless he can train his soul to be strong he pays for his man-knowledge by being afraid for what *may* happen. Stir up your soul. We're alive. We can hope. Only those who see the tomorrows can hope. Up to this minute we have been as safe as if we were back in Deadwood City."

"Oh, I'll drag myself together so's not to show anything," muttered Dinsdale. "But I wish something could happen. I wish it was all over, one way or the other. I'm not afraid of where I will land; but it's the road there that I would like to skip."

"It's trying to guess what road we're to take that's ailing you. We'll walk about and you'll feel better," said Scissors.

When they left the lodge several warriors walked behind them, keeping fifty feet from them. Other men, as if wandering aimlessly, walked abreast of them. Ignoring these watchers the prisoners strolled down the slope toward the South Fork of the Grand where it cuts the butte in two. They halted in sight of the pony herd feeding at the foot of high bluffs. They estimated there were fully five hundred animals in the herd.

Returning to the village they made bold to glance inside various lodges where the flaps were thrown back. The resulting impression was that this particular band was extremely well-to-do in worldly goods. Besides their ponies and robes there were innumerable tin dishes and pewter mugs and pieces of earthenware.

Nearly every lodge had a box or more of ammunition as well as quantities of mackinaw blankets. Also there were saddles of the white man's make, and rifles and revolvers. And every family was lavishly supplied with dried meat.

During their walk the prisoners saw nothing of Crazy Horse or Little Big Man, but Sorrel Horse, the medicine-man, was occasionally glimpsed as he glided behind the lodges and near enough to watch them. Thanks to the orders of Crazy Horse the two were not bothered by the women and children although some of the former hissed like snakes as they passed.

Scissors began cutting pictures of dogs and children, making them exceedingly whimsical, and beckoned for the sullen youngsters to approach and receive them as gifts. At first the children imitated the baleful hostility of the medicine-man and lowered at the smiling picture-man with juvenile ferocity. Gradually curiosity got the better of racial resentment, and one bold urchin counted coup by dashing in and snatching a picture. After that there was much scrambling for the pictures, and as fast as one was secured it was taken to a lodge to display to the equally curious parents. Some one decided the grotesque outlines were medicine, at least good-luck tokens, and one was pinned on the outside of a lodge. The word was quickly passed, and in a very short time a dozen or more lodges were thus decorated.

With rapidly rising anger did Sorrel Horse observe this homage to the white medicine. Striding up to an offending lodge he tore off the picture and scattered it on the ground and harshly rebuked the inmates for having anything to do with a white medicine. His voice carried far, and dusky arms were thrust from the other lodges to remove the pictures.

"He hasn't any right to do that," gravely decided Scissors. "I must teach him a lesson. Let's get away from the lodges where I can think a bit."

They returned to the slope and, avoiding the pony herd, walked down to the river. Their guards followed, but kept at a distance. They seated themselves on the bank of the stream and each became busy with his own thoughts. A slip of a girl stole down to the stream and filled an earthenware jug to overflowing. She had not discovered them and paused for a minute to

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abble her feet in the water. She made a retty figure and Scissors would have preerved her lithe grace with scissors and aper had he not feared to discover himself o her and thus frighten her. The jug was ecorated with a red snake, showing the wner had dreamed of wolves and had arned from them how to locate game. hunca-luta carried the bent stick of a Wolf reamer.

At last the girl decided she had better be out finishing her errand and scrambled om the water and inserted the wooden opper in the jug and smote it with her nall fist to drive it home. The jug being lled to the top of the snout promptly roke under the hydraulic pressure, the leavage being near the bottom and as venly cut as if done by a knife. The girl ared in horror at the broken jug and beran tearing her hair. Scissors stepped forard and addressed her.

Ordinarily she would have fled from him, ut now another fear was gripping her. In broken whisper she explained:

"It is his, the mighty Shunca-luta. Each ay he sends the medicine-jug by me. Now have spoiled it. Now he will work bad edicine against me."

Scissors's eyes sparkled with inspiration nd he kneeled and examined the break ritically. Then he readjusted the two ieces and found they fitted snugly toether. To the girl he said, "Stop your oise, little one. Perhaps my medicine can ake the jug whole."

And lifting his head to make sure the uards had seen nothing of the incident he otioned for Dinsdale to join him.

"Bring water in your hat and fill this up hile I hold it from slipping apart," he dicted.

Deeply puzzled Dinsdale brought water n his felt hat and poured it into the jug. he girl watched with bulging eyes, one mall hand pressed against her rapidly beatng heart. Until disturbed the jug looked he same as ever. When the last hatful rought the water to the top of the snout cissors took the wooden stopper and gently nserted one end and worked slowly so sufficient water might escape to allow the plug o remain in place and exclude the air.

"What nonsense is this?" demanded Dinsdale. "The jug is broken."

"I will talk as we walk back."

Then to the girl he said:

"Lift it gently by the handle. Do not let it hit against your legs. Walk carefully behind us. When you see me talking with Shunca-luta place it gently on the ground where the ground is very smooth and level. Do you understand?"

She bobbed her head, her small round face filled with terror.

"And never tell any one, or it will be bad medicine, and you will never take care of a warrior's lodge," he warned.

The girl gingerly took hold of the handle and lifted the jug. So great was her amazement and fear on beholding the jug remain intact that she came near to dropping it. Then holding it away from her and walking on tip-toe she began the ascent of the slope with the white men striding along before her. Scissors explained to his mystified friend:

"Years ago, and long before I became *wakan* and had learned to forget useless things, I went to school in St. Louis to an old Frenchman. He was a very wise old man, and from him I learned among other things how hydraulic pressure will knock the bottom out of a small-mouth vessel if the vessel is filled to the brim and the stopper is inserted violently. I also learned that where the cleavage is clean the vessel can be fitted together and made to hold water if filled to the brim and the stopper inserted gradually and gently. The atmospheric pressure on the jug is uniform. There is no air inside, hence no pressure. But let the stopper be disturbed ever so little, let there come a space the width of a hair for the air to get in, and out comes the bottom of the jug. Now we will see what we shall see."

WITH the girl counting every step of the way in her anxiety to have her part in the mystery concluded, Scissors proceeded to Shunca-luta's lodge and called on him by name, speaking in a loud voice. The medicine-man came out and glared at the picture-man and waited for him to speak. The girl halted behind the medicine-man and carefully placed the jug on a smooth, level spot, and fled as if demons were after her. Heads popped from the surrounding lodges when Scissors began calling on the medicine-man to face him. Now men and women were watching the two.

"Shunca-luta you have meddled with my

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medicine," accused Scissors. "They say Tunkan is angry at you."

"They say a lie," hissed Sorrel Horse. "Red men do not touch the white man's medicine."

"Two Knives Talking is not a white man. He is red," solemnly declared Scissors.

A bell tinkled and Crazy Horse walked around a lodge, coup wand in hand, and surveyed the two gloomily. The presence of the war chief stimulated Sorrel Horse to oratory; and for a minute he warned the chief and the listening lodges that the sacred flying stones sent by Tunkan were bringing the warning—beware of the white men! When he paused to get his breath Scissors pointed to the jug and said:

"That is made of stone. Tunkan can speak through it. It is painted with the sign of a Wolf-dreamer. It belongs to Shunca-luta. Tunkan can speak through it to him."

Sorrel Horse suspected some trick but could not imagine how the stout jug could be made to figure in it. He answered—

"The stone god tells me through the stone jug that Two Knives Talking makes bad medicine against the red men."

"Then let the jug give a sign that you have spoken true words," challenged Scissors.

Sorrel Horse was now thoroughly puzzled. But the eager gaze of his chief and the warriors told him he must do something. "Tunkan has already said through the jug that the white men are liars and will go under the skinning-knives."

The listeners accepted this as conclusive and their fierce eyes exulted in anticipation of the sport. Scissors cried:

"Two Knives Talking asked for a sign that Tunkan is displeased with the white men who have become red at heart and Shunca-luta gives only words. Now Tunkan has spoken to me in dreams. He says Shunca-luta has poor ears and does not hear what is spoken. He says he told Shunca-luta that the picture medicine is good for squaws and children. It makes them laugh. He says he told Shunca-luta it is good medicine to fasten on the lodges, but Shunca-luta has torn it down."

"Two Knives Talking uses words," harshly spoke up Crazy Horse.

"Two Knives Talking has asked Tunkan for a sign to prove his tongue is straight. The jug is stone and very strong, and yet before Shunca-luta can drink from it Tunkan will break it."

The onlookers, incredulous, grunted and jeered. Scissors folded his arms and with level gaze dared Shunca-luta to make the test. Sorrel Horse stared at the jug. It was his. The girl had brought it, filled with water, even while he was talking with the white man. He took it by the handle and lifted it. It was a very strong jug. It was impossible for anything to break it before he could take a drink. And to prove that fact he yanked out the stopper and started to lift it to his lips.

The bottom dropped out and the water splashed down the medicine-man's legs. To the white men it was a ludicrous tableau. The medicine-man stood rigid, the stopper clutched in one hand, the upper part of the jug held in the other, his eyes bulging. But there was nothing humorous in the spectacle to the Indians. Even Crazy Horse stepped back and stared uneasily at the prisoners. With a low gasp of fright Shunca-luta dropped the fragment of the jug and darted back into his lodge.

Shunca-luta knew he had imposed on the credulous with trickery and sleight-of-hand. He had known at the camp on Crow Creek that the white man was outwitting him with sleight-of-hand tactics. But he had not dared to create any doubt as to the genuineness of his own magic by attempting to show up the prestidigitation of his rival. Now was something entirely different.

Here was a genuine demonstration of a superior medicine. It shook and racked his very soul. That Tunkan should turn against him and favor a white man was unthinkable; and yet it was a fact. There had been no chance for cheating. Two Knives Talking had not touched the jug. The appearance of the jug on the scene was merely an accident.

The jug was whole when the medicine-man picked it up. It was filled with water. It did not break until he attempted to drink. The catastrophe was too great to permit of jealousy; it was so terrific that he did not have thought even for his lost caste.

The effect on the spectators was also tremendous. Crazy Horse in silence examined the broken jug. It was all entirely beyond his comprehension and was as much of a miracle as if the white man had precipitated the southern half of the butte into the fork of the Grand.

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"We go to our lodge, Tashunca-uitco," id Scissors, the first one to break the si-ıce.

Linking his arm through Dinsdale's he ılked to the lodge, followed by the gaze the entire village. Once they were reened from the view of the Ogalala Dins-le exclaimed:

"It beat anything I ever saw. Talk about ck! If that girl hadn't broken the jug——"

"If! If!" repeated Scissors impatiently. am *wakan witshasha*. I wish you would member that. I am different from other en. Many things I have forgotten be-use a *wakan* man is not supposed to re-ember rubbish. But the things I have arned from life come back to me when ıe knowledge can help me. When a man ın remember only the helpful and forget ıe useless, then he is *wakan*."

"All I know is this; if you can work two r three more tricks as good as that they'll e turning you loose and begging you to get ut."

"When they turn me loose they must ırn you loose. I don't go without you."

"That's foolishness. Staying won't help ıe any. Take your chance when you can rab it. I would if I was in your shoes."

"You are lying. You may be a gun-ghter and not much good in several ways, ut you'd never quit. I never could go back nd face old Sitting Bull, my owl medicine, nd tell him I'd saved my own hide, but ad left you to be skinned. We're gitting long. Every day I'm showing them I'm *ıakan*. That jug business would have sent itting Bull himself back into the hills to ıake fresh medicine.

"Shunca-luta isn't any slouch. How he nade himself to appear sick unto death is ıeyond me. What I did on Crow Creek vas only sleight-of-hand. Fellows on the tage back in the States can beat me all hol-ow at it. Even if Shunca-luta knew this ast was some trick he'd never tell his red riends. It's better for his reputation to ıave the Indians believe the gods beat him than that I outfooled him. A man can't be blamed if the gods down him. He even can be a very respectable sort of a figure because the gods found him to be worth bothering with. Yes, that jug medicine will always stick in his craw."

While waiting for the village to recover some of its composure they remained in the entrance; and as they talked Scissors amused himself by cutting out pictures of the yelping curs and fat puppies. No one came near them and the family in the nearest lodge moved through the rear wall to a more remote shelter.

"Very soon this will be looked on as a white medicine lodge," mused Scissors after he had discovered the surreptitious withdrawal of their neighbors.

Dinsdale discerned a great advantage in their isolation and whispered:

"Why not try for it now? They're still stupid over the trick. If we could reach the ponies we could race for it."

"The minute we try that Crazy Horse will know we've lied, that you're no friend of High Wolf, that our medicine is just a game. And he'll be so mad he'll chase us clear into the hills, and if we're captured they'll have us taken apart inside of five minutes. We must have some chance of getting away before making the attempt. As it is now they'd soon overhaul us even if we got something of a start. Late afternoon is the time to try for it."

"I believe we can do it," said Dinsdale.

"Maybe you're *wakan*, too. If you believe it strong enough you can do it. We'll look at the ponies."

They sauntered through the village without beholding child or grown-up, except as they had fleeting glimpses of the village police, or akicita men. Yet they knew that sharp eyes were staring at them from every lodge they passed. On reaching the slope and making toward the pony herd they observed the usual guards were on duty.

That these braves did not relish the company of the white men was evidenced by an arrow describing a high arc and falling upright before them. This signal to keep back was not prompted by any fear the prisoners would attempt to appropriate ponies and flee. Rather, it was an announcement that the red men wished the white magicians to keep at a distance.

"They're scared of us," said Scissors proudly. "It's useless to try it. We must wait till they've lost some of their fear."

"You'd better not try any more tricks if it's going to make them watch us like hawks," said Dinsdale gloomily.

"I'm *wakan witshasha*. My medicine will tell me when to act and when to be idle," said Scissors. "Here comes one now who must talk with us. He seeks us. It is good. He knows he must have an understanding

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with us if he would save himself from being known as a failure."

The figure approaching them had the head muffled in a blanket, but Scissors had identified him as Shunca-luta. Scissors turned one side as if to pass without speaking, but halted as a troubled voice said—

"My medicine tells me to talk with the white men."

"Your medicine is wise and very strong. Our ears are open," replied Scissors, dropping to the ground.

Shunca-luta seated himself but did not uncover his head. After a minute of silence the medicine-man declared— "Unless Shunca-luta can learn the jug magic he will be a ghost and wander alone."

"Shunca-luta should talk to Tunkan and paint the rocks green and red," advised Scissors.

"He has talked long to the sacred stones. They tell him to talk to the jug-breaker. I will give many ponies to get the medicine of the jug."

Scissors laughed at him.

"Two Knives Talking can give you the medicine that breaks jugs, but many ponies will not buy it."

"Let the white man tell the price for the medicine."

Scissors produced his paper and scissors and cut out a jug. Next he cut two bowed figures mounted on galloping ponies, each figure wearing a hat to show it was a white man. He dropped them on the ground before Sorrel Horse. A lean hand darted through the blanket and snatched up the paper pictures.

"When will the white man sell?" whispered the medicine-man.

"It must be before any rider comes from the Short Medicine Pole Hills."

"Shunca-luta knows the young white man is not High Wolf's friend. He knows Two Knives Talking is afraid of the talk High Wolf will send. If he tells what he knows in Tashunca-uitco's ear the Ogalala will make two new medicine shirts out of white skin."

"That is true," agreed Scissors. "It is true we want to ride away from here. It is true Tashunca-uitco will have us skinned if you can make him believe the truth. Go and tell him now. Then pick up a jug and have it break in your hands. Go away from your people and have men of other villages drive you back from their lodge, calling you the "jug-breaker," the medicine-man whom Tunkan forgot. Live alone with the owls and other ghost-voices. Two Knives Talking will wait here in the sunlight while you tell Tashunca-uitco that the white men are afraid of High Wolf's talk."

Sorrel Horse sat with bowed head, the mackinaw blanket covering all but his moccasins. Finally he said:

"Before any talk is brought from High Wolf two ponies will be hidden at the south end of the butte. When the white men go it must not be known. The village will believe they are following the river to the west. They must ride from the south end of the butte and keep away from the river.

They must ride hard and fast to the little hill where the Crows were killed and reach the head of Owl River above Slave Butte. Those who give chase will turn back when they do not find a trail along the Grand. Shunca-luta's medicine will see the white men making north to Fort Lincoln."

"Two rifles must be with the ponies and a bundle of food," said Scissors. "For if the white men are brought back it would be very bad for Shunca-luta. He could never pick up a jug again without it breaking. As the medicine grows stronger kettles would break. He could not drink or eat from any dish, but would live like a thing on four legs. If a rider comes from High Wolf before we get away I will show every child in the village how to break jugs and the medicine-man will be driven from the village because he can break only what he tries to use."

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'After he knows the white man's medi-
e he can pick up a jug and not break it?"
diously asked the muffled voice.
'He will never break a jug unless he
nts to," firmly assured Scissors.
'Two ponies with food and guns will be
ere it has been said," promised the medi-
e-man.
'How soon?"
'In a few sleeps. Before a man comes
m the hills. Shunca-luta must be cun-
ıg as the kit-fox. He has things to do
ıt."
He rose and left them, still wearing his
ınket so that no man might look on his
ɔe. As the prisoners walked back to the
ɛlage Scissors explained the talk to his
mpanion, and said:
"He'll stick to his bargain, too. He'd
ther have a hundred men escape than to be
ughed at as a man who has lost his medi-
ıe. He'd rather have a thousand escape
an to have every dish he touches break
his hands."
"I wish it could be tonight!" groaned
insdale. "Action! Anything rather than
is waiting! Every minute I expect to see
ıe of those ——ions riding and whooping
to the village and yelling out that the
heyenne says I am a liar."
"Sorrel Horse believes he has more at
ake than we have. Stop worrying."
When they came to Sorrel Horse's lodge
: was standing in the entrance, his eyes
ittering ominously. He held up a jug and
iped his lips and said:
"The medicine stops working against
ıunca-luta. He drinks without the jug
:eaking."
"Fool!" growled Scissors. "Because Two
nives Talking stopped the medicine from
orking until Shunca-luta could pay for it
oes he think the medicine grows weak? I
ill break this jug——"
With a low howl of fear Sorrel Horse
ırust the jug inside the lodge and begged:
"Wait. Shunca-luta buys the medicine.
le wanted to see how strong is the white
ıan's heart."
With a menacing scowl Scissors passed on,
elling Dinsdale:
"Have to watch him like a snake. I
ıight have known he would have risked
ɔne more jug. But he'll be good now. All
I'm afraid of is that Crazy Horse may take
ı notion to see the trick repeated."
Dinsdale's spirits dropped below the zero mark. He considered it very ominous that Crazy Horse should pass them without appearing to see them. But Scissors replied this ignorement was much better than a command for the white medicine to break another jug. That night they were served with meat and berries by the young girl who broke the jug at the river. She trembled with fear and remained in the lodge only long enough to deposit the various bowls of food.

Dinsdale threw himself on his robes after eating and morosely said:

"That girl's another danger point. She's sure to blab."

"No fear. They couldn't burn it out of her. She believes she has been permitted to see what no women of her people ever saw before—the gods demonstrating their medicine. She's scared blue, but she'll never tell."

THE third day was much like the second. The prisoners wandered toward the pony herd under the bluffs and again one of the mounted guards sent an admonitory arrow. The attitude of the men and women was improved however, and although they would not speak to the white men they no longer hid on beholding them approaching.

As the two strolled about the village the grown-ups pretended not to sense their presence. The children kept at a distance and yet were always in sight. Scissors cut out some pictures of dogs, ponies and elk and dropped them on the ground. These pictures were picked up after the white men had moved on. Toward sunset they saw several lodges having some of the pictures pinned on the outside. The inmates had decided the white man's paper magic would bring good luck; nor did Sorrel Horse object to them.

Crazy Horse left the village early in the morning, and the girl bringing their food told the prisoners he had gone west with a picked body of men. Scissors interpreted this journey to mean the war chief was worried over the failure of his messengers to return from the Short Medicine Pole Hills.

The chief returned at sunset, his pony fagged. The mounts of his men were also played out, showing they had traveled furiously. He did not come to see his prisoners; nor would the guards outside the lodge give any information. The last thing Scissors

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did before the sun vanished was to stand outside the lodge and stare toward the west and northwest. He waited and watched as long as it would be possible to behold a signal smoke against the sky. With a deep breath of relief he rejoined Dinsdale and remarked—

"They can't get a smoke tonight."

"But a messenger can ride in any moment," was the moody reply. "And his coming will be the signal for cutting our throats."

"I'm *wakan witshasha*. Nothing has happened yet. Wonder where Shunca-luta has been today. Haven't seen hide nor hair of him, and his lodge is closed tight. He must have left the village very early."

"He'll betray us. I'm sorry you told him what you did."

"He will not betray us. He'll return and say he's been back in the hills making a new medicine, one that will let him break jugs without touching them," said Scissors.

"I think we're fools not to make a break tonight," mumbled Dinsdale.

"They have a strong night-guard. We'd be run down in no time. Shunca-luta has the right notion—strike off from the southern end of the butte and make Owl River. We must have guns and food."

Dinsdale's moral courage was slipping fast. Physical courage he had in abundance. Risks that he could discern and grapple with, even with the odds big against him, alarmed him not. But he had no defense against his imagination. He was entirely recovered from the hardships of the journey to the butte, but he was finding it difficult to sleep nights.

There was a new note in the morning's confusion. To the excited barking of dogs was added the shrill calls of children, telling their elders to come out and behold a new mystery. The prisoners, ever fearing a disastrous turn in their affairs, crawled to the flap and looked out. A man wearing on his head the skin of an elk's head with horns attached, and an elk-hide over his shoulders, was moving slowly between the lodges.

His hands and legs were painted yellow and in each hand he carried a hoop covered with elk-hide and decorated with bergamot, an herb much liked by elks. Ahead of this grotesque figure walked two girls carrying a long-stemmed red sandstone pipe, decorated in the *wakan* fashion. As the masked man advanced he went through certain grotesque maneuvers that caused Dinsdale to open his eyes very wide.

"What the —— is it, and what is it trying to do?" he whispered.

"The pipe's a medicine-pipe. It must be Shunca-luta. The head covering and hoops tell the people he has dreamed of an elk and has visited an Elk lodge in his sleep, and is now under the protection of their medicine. He's trying to act like an elk. See! The people understand. None of the women stay on the windward side and no one goes near him. They're making themselves believe he is an elk. Now what is he up to?"

Shunca-luta had turned between two lodges and was running rapidly. Ahead of him was a wide miry spot. After he had passed this he turned and nodded his head toward it. As he moved on men and women pressed on after him and began clapping their hands to their mouths to express amazement. Scissors left the lodge and hurried toward them, Dinsdale remaining behind. As Scissors drew up the group dissolved and moved away from him. He examined the ground to see what they had been staring at. Smothering a smile he returned to Dinsdale.

"What's the row?" asked Dinsdale.

"That fellow is very cunning. There are tracks of an elk in the muddy spot. They really believe he wore the feet of an elk in passing over it. Of course he took some hoofs and made the tracks early this morning. Now he runs and jumps over the spot and they'll always believe his feet turned to hoofs long enough for him to leave the tracks."

"Pretty shallow," grumbled Dinsdale. "How could he know some one hadn't seen the tracks right after he made them?"

"It's all the same," said Scissors. "Then they'd believe he had passed that way already and had left them. After we've eaten we'll look him up."

"I'll stay here. Only time I want to see any of them is when I've got my guns with me."

The young girl brought their breakfast, her bright eyes fairly shining with excitement. Much of her former fear had vanished, and when Scissors questioned her she readily told him:

"Shunca-luta comes back from the hills with an elk dream. He sacrificed two of his

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ponies. Now he dreams of an elk and the elks give him a very strong medicine. He says he will make the jug-breaking medicine after a few sleeps."

She ran away to observe more wonders, and after Scissors had translated her speech Dinsdale growled and complained—

"I told you so. I knew that —— would ring in a cold deck."

Scissors smiled contentedly and said:

"You're forgetting the two ponies he's 'sacrificed.' He's smart. He's working them up by degrees to believe he can break jugs. He'll have them at the proper pitch just about the time we light out. They'll never suspect him of having anything to do with our going. He even arranges it so none of his ponies will be missing except the two he 'sacrificed' several sleeps before we got away. He's clever. He's setting his stage for a big effect. And the funny part will be that he'll never understand how he breaks the jugs. He'll go to his grave firmly convinced it is my medicine that lets him do it; but he'll tell the Indians he got it from the Elk lodge he visited in his dream. I must go around and see him."

He succeeded in seeing Sorrel Horse but was unable to speak with him privately. Warriors and women were standing thick about the medicine-man's lodge. The flap and a part of one side were drawn back and the spectators were watching the latest favorite of the mythical Elks as he painted the figures of a crane and a crow on the inside of the covering. Already the outside was fresh with yellow paint.

Sorrel Horse had laid aside his mask and was wearing the emblem of an Elk dreamer in his hair. This was the circle and was exemplified by a small hoop of porcupine quills, from which hung a small white eagle feather. This last was to remind all who beheld that the wearer could run as fast as an eagle can fly—should he so desire. The assembled Indians glared triumphantly at the white man; for their own medicine-man had renewed and increased his *wakan* powers by adding the strength of the Elk to that of the Wolf. Crazy Horse strode through the group and after darting a glance at Sorrel Horse said to Scissors—

"They say Shunca-luta will break jugs without touching them."

"When?" asked Scissors.

Crazy Horse did not answer but looked inquiringly at Sorrel Horse. The medicine-man paused in his work of painting a pipe for the crane to hold with the stem pointing upward, and confidently proclaimed—

"By the end of a few sleeps Shunca-luta will break jugs."

"Shunca-luta has been making a very strong medicine," Scissors politely said.

"He has been back in the hills where he made his heart humble by giving two of his best ponies to Taku wakan. Then Taku wakan talked to him through an elk dream. Tunkan's flying rocks have told him he shall break jugs."

Scissors turned away, pleased to know Sorrel Horse had burned his bridges behind him and must now complete his bargain for the white man's magic. Crazy Horse followed behind Scissors and said:

"The young men do not come with a talk from High Wolf. Has Two Knives seen them in his dreams?"

"Has Tashunca-uitco asked his medicine-man about the scouts?"

"Shunca-luta has been dreaming of elks. He must paint his lodge before he can look in a dream for my young men."

"Two Knives Talking has seen in a dream two men riding north from the Short Medicine Pole Hill as if looking for a soldier smoke. The dream men had no heads. Two Knives Talking could not see if they were old or young."

"They are ghosts. They have been killed," muttered Crazy Horse.

"Two Knives Talking believes the dream means they do not know just where to look for a smoke."

"They would never leave the hills to look for soldiers if High Wolf and his Cheyennes were in the hills."

Scissors shrugged his shoulders and replied:

"What is it to the white men where they ride? They are fed each day and have a good lodge to sleep in."

Crazy Horse glared wrathfully at the back of Scissors's head, and warned—

"If no talk comes from High Wolf at the end of three sleeps, and if Shunca-luta's new medicine says the white men are liars they will eat no more Ogalala meat and berries."

"Shunca-luta's medicine will never tell the Ogalala to skin the white men," calmly replied Scissors. "The white men went to Mato tipi to find a trail to this village. Little Big Man surrounded us. We made no fight, for our medicine told us Little Big

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Man would bring us to Tashunca-uitco. It is so. My white brother, Two Guns Shooting, could have killed many of them, for his gun medicine is very strong. But he did not hurt them."

Crazy Horse mused over this statement for some minutes and a new interest flickered in his downcast eyes. All that pertained to the use of weapons appealed to him, for he was a fighting man from moccasins to eagle feathers. He paid due homage to all medicine-men when they proved they were *wakan-witshasha*, but it was skill in the use of weapons that caused his gloomy eyes to flash with enthusiasm. He said nothing until they were close to the prisoners' lodge. Then he spoke and Scissors turned to listen.

"Tashunca-uitco has the young man's guns. Do they really say he can fire them better than Taschunca-uitco?"

Scissors smiled as if amused at the query.

"Let the young man talk for himself through the guns," he suggested. "Two Knives Talking does not know how fast and straight Tashunca-uitco can shoot. He only knows about the white man. After my white brother has done his best then the mighty war-chief can show him how a man should shoot."

Crazy Horse walked away, his head bowed. Scissors entered the lodge and told Dinsdale:

"I think there's a chance for you to show some gun-play. The chief is curious to see what you can do. Too bad your nerves are shaken to pieces."

"Shaken to pieces?" snarled Dinsdale. "It's this waiting for something to happen that's troubling me. Give me my hand-guns and a target and I'll show you how my nerves are. My shooting nerves are always steady."

"That's a good talk. I think you'll have a chance very soon. The chief understands revolvers and rifles, but he's never seen any fancy revolver shooting."

Dinsdale paced about the lodge, his body erect, his eyes glowing. To feel the guns in his hands once more would do him a world of good. Nor did Scissors err in estimating the extent of the chief's curiosity. Crazy Horse returned to his own lodge undecided whether to have the young man give an exhibition or not. But once he fell to contemplating the two big Colts the idea fastened upon him.

He was always ready to learn better technique in the handling of firearms. Dwelling apart from the reservations he had missed seeing soldiers and officers at target practise and his acquaintance with the white man's skill had been largely limited to skirmishes and battles when individual scores could not be followed.

For the old plainsman and mountain man he had the greatest respect, but these seldom fought with hand-guns. Within thirty minutes after Scissors had spoken to his companion Little Big Man called at the lodge and sullenly announced the prisoners were to follow him.

THE village seemed to be empty as the three passed between the lodges. But on the slope leading to the river and the pony herd were gathered the men, women, children and most of the dogs. All were waiting with childish eagerness to witness the white man's skill. Crazy Horse was seated apart from the assemblage and had the two revolvers on a robe before him. The white men were halted ten feet from the robe and the chief asked—

"Does the young man wish to show the Ogalala how to shoot?"

"He is ready to show them," Scissors answered.

"How does he want to shoot?" asked the chief. "He must shoot away from us."

Scissors repeated this query to Dinsdale and the latter replied:

"Tell him to have some of his men stand up the slope behind me and throw gourds and dishes down the slope and over my head. That will let me keep my back to the people."

"But a flock of dishes flying over your head!" remonstrated Scissors.

"The more the better. I'll score something very fair out of a dozen shots. The more targets the more fussy I can be in selecting each one. Of course they're not to throw all at once."

Scissors repeated the suggestion to the chief. Crazy Horse readily agreed to it. Scissors requested that his friend be permitted to watch a trial flight of missiles to test his eyes, inasmuch as he had been inside the lodge much of the time. This, and the further stipulation that the targets be not thrown in a mass met with the chief's approval, and he gave an order to the spectators.

The women ran back to the lodges to

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secure mugs, bowls and tin plates. A dozen warriors with rifles were drawn up behind Dinsdale ready to shoot him down did he offer to face about before dropping the revolvers to the ground. Scissors explained all this, and Dinsdale curtly answered:

"I understand. But I want to look at the guns and see if they are all right before I commence."

While the target-bearers were streaming back from the village Scissors stood behind his friend and threw rocks and clumps of dirt over his head. Then Crazy Horse unloaded the weapons and took them to Dinsdale and watched him closely as he spun the cylinders and tested the trigger action.

"I am ready to load," he told Scissors.

He faced down the slope and reached a hand behind him for the cartridges. Crazy Horse handed these to Scissors and hurried back to his blanket. Scissors fed them into the oustretched hand and Dinsdale examined each critically before slipping it into a chamber. At last he was ready and stood with the guns half raised, his head tilted back so as to catch an early sight of the targets as they flew over his head.

The men with the rifles crouched within five feet of him, while those chosen to throw the targets stood some fifteen feet away. Ten men were picked to throw the gourds and dishes. To prevent a too general discharge of targets Crazy Horse ordered that three men on each end of the line should throw in turn, from right to left and transversely, while the four center men should hurl straight ahead, each taking his turn. This would allow not more than three targets crossing Dinsdale's field of vision at the same time.

The gathering on the slope became as quiet as a tableau. All eyes were focussed on the motionless figure holding both arms half raised, the head back as if making a sun dance vow to Wakantanka.

"Be ready!" Scissors broke the silence by yelping as a man on each end drew back his arm.

Then one after another the warriors hurled dish, mug, or plate, and Dinsdale worked both guns for a total of seven shots and dropped his hands to his side as the last dish scaled to the ground.

It did not seem possible to the spectators that he could have released that number of shots. They had expected to hear distinct detonations, and instead it had been a blurred crackling sound of very brief duration. There was something so casual about the whole performance that none deemed it possible more than one hit could have been scored, and that would be by accident. It was all over so soon there was only one feature which was recalled—how a tin plate had deviated from its gliding flight by jumping convulsively.

"Drop your guns," advised Scissors.

Dinsdale did so; then the squaws scuttled forward to bring back the targets. Hands patted against lips. Grunts and sharp yelps sounded. Crazy Horse leaned forward and looked at the prisoner with new respect. Six of the seven shots had registered.

"Did well, son," murmured Scissors.

"It's a joke," replied Dinsdale. "Not more than three were in fair position at the same time. I was a fool to miss even the one shot. It was a plate, broadside to, and it shifted to edge-on just as I fired. I'll stick to the bowls and mugs next time. Ask the chief if he wants me to hit the same target more than once, or a different target with each shot."

Scissors put the question and Crazy Horse courteously answered it was for the young man to decide. He said it would be as *wakan* to hit one target twice as to hit two targets once. Scissors reminded the chief that Dinsdale had five shots left. Then he warned Dinsdale:

"Man on your right has a big bowl. He'll throw across to your left. Pick up your guns."

"Let's hope he throws slow and high," mumbled Dinsdale, bending and securing the guns.

Despite his condemnation of the spinning plates he could not resist centering one the instant it appeared overhead, the full surface showing and making an easy mark. He used his left-hand gun on this, and within a second split a mug crossing to his right with the same gun. Then appeared the big bowl, thrown high and traveling in a broad arc from right to left. Firing the last shot in his left-hand gun with much deliberation, he then fired twice with his right, the latter shots blending as one. He dropped the guns and waited.

"*Washte-holo!*" grunted Crazy Horse. "Bring me the guns. Bring the bowls and the plate."

Scissors carried the revolvers to the robe and remarked—

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"Tashunca-uitco now knows my friend could have killed many of Little Big Man's band had we been looking for a fight instead of for this village."

"He was caught with his guns in his belt," spoke up Little Big Man.

"Then let him have the empty guns in his belt and let Little Big Man show Tashunca-uitco how he surprized the white man," challenged Scissors.

This appealed to Crazy Horse, who nodded it should be done, the capture being acted in pantomime. In the meanwhile the targets were brought forward, the plate and the several pieces of the bowl. Fresh astonishment was expressed and then the stage was cleared for a bit of dramatic acting. Little Big Man, as master of ceremonies, arrogantly insisted that Dinsdale should stand with his back to the red men and should not attempt to draw a weapon until Little Big Man whistled. Dinsdale dutifully turned his back and Little Big Man and his braves began crawling forward.

Scissors bit his lips in anger at Little Big Man's portrayal of the capture. He was making the spectators believe the white men knew nothing of the Indians' appearance until the dusky hands were all but on them. At last as the half circle of braves were stretching out hands to haul Dinsdale to the ground Little Big Man whistled, and Dinsdale leaped from them and turned about while his feet were clear of the ground. And the two guns were out and clicking madly and fanning the short line of red men. Versed in pantomime there was none of the onlookers who did not concede the victory to the white man.

"His gun medicine is very *wakan*," called out Crazy Horse as he waved the warriors back from continuing their attack.

"Bring me the guns."

Taking them from Scissors he walked back to his lodge.

The prisoners returned to their lodge, followed at a respectful distance by the Indians and guarded by the *akacita*, village police. Little Big Man was much chagrined. His companions were convinced his life had been at the mercy of the young white warrior, and secretly he was admitting the fact himself. As they were passing the lodge of Sorrel Horse the medicine-man stuck out his head and announced:

"Shunca-luta has been trying his new medicine. He tried very hard. He told it to help the white man to shoot."

"It made him miss a very easy shot," Scissors hurled back at him. "It is a very weak medicine just now. It must grow big before it can break jugs."

The medicine-man vanished.

When this exchange had been explained to Dinsdale he angrily denounced him.

"The cheap bluffer! Trying to get credit on another man's work. I'm more scared of that snake than I am of the chief."

"You needn't be scared of him at all. I've bought him, I tell you. He must learn how to break jugs and he can only learn on our terms, and he knows it."

"You must teach him the trick before you get the ponies; after that what is there to stop him from deserting us?" asked Dinsdale. "I don't trust him."

"Nor I, except in this one thing. I know how troubled he is. After I've shown him the mysteries of hydraulic pressure it will remain just as much a miracle to him as it was when the jug broke in his hands. He will believe it will refuse to work for him if he plays us false. It's to his interests for us to get away. When he tried the trick he doesn't want us around to say we told him how to do it, and then proceed to prove it by showing others how to do it. You're feeling better, aren't you?" The last as he noted the sparkle in Dinsdale's eyes and the uplifted chin.

"It was having the old guns in my hands again and being allowed to use them," he muttered. "If I could only have them back and be mounted on a good nag! I'd ride through this whole rat-trap of a village. It's the danger of being killed in a corner, with no show of fighting back, that takes the heart out of me."

"I'm *wakan witshasha*. Every thing will come out all right. Sorrel Horse will fix it so we can steal away to the ponies within two days."

"Why does he wait and risk our being snagged by some word from High Wolf?"

Scissors sighed and shook his head.

"It's the Indian in him. He's as keen to have us go as we are to go. But he can't change his nature. He's got some plan in his head and he's working it out. His elk dream is part of it. His being away in the hills is a part of it. He must take so many steps in this particular dance even if it costs his own life. But remember this: He has

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much influence with the braves and squaws. They fear him. He'll be one of the first to know if there is a smoke-signal, or hard-riding messenger. In case of either he'll rush things. I believe that he will begin to pick up all the loose threads tomorrow. Then it's a hard ride and the Lord help us!"

CHAPTER XI

THE SHOW-DOWN

ON THE second morning after Dinsdale's exhibition of marksmanship Scissors jumped from his couch and announced:

"Something will happen today. I feel it. The waiting is ended. I am *wakan witshasha*, and I know the waiting will be ended today. Get up and be ready for whatever happens. We have much to do."

Dinsdale sprang to his feet, crying:

"Show me something to do. It seems as if I had been in this cursed place a million years. What shall I do?"

"First, eat your breakfast. The girl is bringing it now. I must see Sorrel Horse and finish our trade."

"How do you happen to know so much about Injuns?" curiously asked Dinsdale after the girl had placed the food on a robe and had departed.

"Played with Sioux boys when I was a boy. After I became *wakan* I forgot lots of things, but what I learned about Indians seems to have remained with me. Sometimes I find myself singing some of their old songs, songs I hadn't thought of for years."

They made short work of the meal, and Scissors said:

"Stick by the lodge. I'll finish my talk with Sorrel Horse very quick."

"And you said there was work to do," grumbled Dinsdale.

"We've spent our last night here if we're ever to see Deadwood City again," assured Scissors. At these words Dinsdale became nervously alert and eager.

The inmates of the village no longer avoided Scissors, or pretended not to see him; but he knew there was only one man in the village who did not wish to see him writhing under the Ogalala knives. He walked aimlessly among the lodges and approached the lodge of Sorrel Horse in a casual manner. He was pleased to observe that while the *akacita* kept an eye on his movements they did not display any concern, and their espionage was perfunctory. They did not follow, nor keep abreast of him, as if fearing he would make a break for liberty. In fact, it was thoroughly believed that neither white man would desert the other. On reaching the lodge Scissors halted to watch Sorrel Horse go through his morning custom of hanging his medicine-bag to the medicine-pole outside the entrance.

"It is time," mumbled Sorrel Horse without looking at the white man. "The ponies are ready. Two Knives Talking will pay for them now."

"He comes to pay. But the medicine will not work until he has reached the ponies."

Sorrel Horse led him into the lodge and dropped the flap, and said:

"The young white man will be very sick when you go back to him. He will be sick from eating too much meat. Two Knives Talking will stay by him to make him well. He can not leave his sick brother to watch Shunca-luta break jugs on the open place outside the village. All the Ogalala will want to see the new medicine. While they watch, the white men will go among the bluffs and follow the pony trail south where they will find ponies hobbled and feeding. Two guns are there and a bundle of dried meat. Now will the white man pay?"

And he pointed to an array of jugs and several kettles filled with water.

Scissors picked up a jug and found it filled to within a few inches of the mouth. He examined the stopper to make sure it would exclude all air and then handed it to Sorrel Horse and told him to cork the jug and break it by striking the stopper with his fist. Sorrel Horse nervously followed instructions and was much cast down when nothing happened.

"It is because you have no medicine of your own," explained Scissors. "Now I will give you a medicine."

And he removed the stopper and pointed it to the earth, the sky, and the four winds. Then with a mug he dipped water from a kettle and filled the jug to overflowing and gently inserted the end of the stopper until it stood upright.

"Now strike!" he commanded.

Sorrel Horse obeyed, and this time the hydraulic pressure rewarded his efforts and brought a glare of triumph to his eyes. His chest expanded and he softly boasted:

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"They say he will have a new name. They say he can break jugs."

Scissors eyed him suspiciously and pulled forward another jug, only half full, and releasing the stopper curtly directed—

"Break that jug."

Sorrel Horse confidently struck the stopper and the jug remained intact. As the medicine-man hung his head in bitter disappointment Scissors told him:

"I have taken the medicine away from you so you will know it is my medicine and will not work if I do not get away from the village. Now I will give the medicine back to you. Bring water and fill this broken jug."

As he spoke he fitted the two pieces together, the cleavage being clean, and held them in place while Sorrel Horse with trembling hands lifted a kettle and poured in the water. When the jug could hold no more Scissors revealed the climax of the medicine by teaching the medicine-man how to work gently in inserting the stopper deep enough to remain in place and yet to prevent any air pressure on the mouth; only he said nothing about pressure as the Indian would not have understood. Sorrel Horse simply understood the manipulation of the stopper was the *wakan* way of doing it. Had he been told to plug the jug while one hand was held high above his head his faith would have been as great and the mystery no more profound.

"Now lift it by the handle," said Scissors.

The hand of Sorrel Horse shook convulsively and he could scarcely grip his fingers about the handle. He was on the threshold of conquering the greatest mystery he had ever attempted. To have Tunkan break a jug in his hands had been astounding. But to be permitted by the stone god to break a jug and then fill it with water and then to break it a second time surpassed his wildest dreams of wizardry. Even Sitting Bull, himself, could not do it.

He lifted on the handle and the jug rose from the ground and remained intact. The medicine-man stood holding it, his small eyes protruding, his breath coming in gasps and the sweat oozing from his copper forehead as he felt the close presence of the gods. Scissors explained the *wakan* way was always to place the jug on a smooth, level spot. Under his directions the medicine-man lowered the jug to the ground.

Scissors took his paper and scissors and cut out two ponies, each having a white rider, and laid the pictures on the ground and solemnly directed:

"Now if your heart is clean, now if you will do as you have said by the white men, Tunkan will hear you. Break the jug by taking out the stopper."

Of course the jug collapsed and the water escaped once the plug was removed. Scissors advised:

"Have the little water-girl help you hold the jug when you fill it. Be sure it stands on a level place. If a jug breaks in more than two pieces do not try to fill it. Such a jug is weak and does not please Tunkan. Two Knives Talking goes to look after his sick brother."

Sorrel Horse caught up his medicine wolf-robe and covered his head and crouched low on the earthen floor of the lodge and did not look up or speak when Scissors departed.

Dinsdale was nervously walking about the lodge, snapping his fingers, his flushed face betraying his highly strung nerves. He was surprized to have Scissors abruptly command—

"Lie down and be sick."

"What the ——!" exploded Dinsdale.

"You have eaten too much meat and wild cherries. You are very sick. Lie down."

"You're crazy."

"You must pretend to be sick," Scissors elucidated. "Sorrel Horse will show his medicine to the village this afternoon. We can not be there. One white man sick; one white man watching over him."

"We're lighting out this afternoon?" hoarsely whispered Dinsdale, clutching Scissors's hand and hurting it. "Why couldn't you say that at the start?"

"I say it now. Some time this afternoon. I would like to wait until evening, but I do not dare. I am *wakan*, and I can hear the pounding of a pony's hoofs. Some one is riding to this village."

"—— if I know when to take you seriously," muttered Dinsdale. "You'll get me to hearing and seeing things next. But if I'm sick, here goes." And he flopped down on the robes. "Now while I suffer please tell me what you've been up to."

"Before I spend time talking the village must know you're sick," said Scissors. He ran out the lodge and called to one of the *akacita* and asked that the roots of sage and wild licorice be brought him so he might sing the bear song over his sick friend and cure him.

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The roots were quickly brought, presumably obtained from the medicine-bag of Sorrel Horse; and word was spread throughout the village that one of the prisoners was ill. There were those who declared that Sorrel Horse was recovering his medicine and was killing the white man's medicine. But when it was understood that Scissors was using licorice, the medicine the bear digs up, and was singing the bear song, there was much doubt as to the efficacy of Sorrel Horse's magic.

Then to increase the tension Sorrel Horse instructed the *akacita* to announce to all the lodges that after the sun started down the west he would break a jug on the river slope and prove that he was a favorite of the stone god and that Tunkan still worked through him.

"He has stolen the white man's medicine! They really say it does what he tells it to do!" joyously shouted some.

Crazy Horse was infected by the excitement and called at the prisoners' lodge after having a talk with Sorrel Horse. When he stuck his head inside it was to behold Dinsdale, eyes closed, tossing his head from side to side and mumbling incoherently. Scissors sat beside him and fanned him with a fan of eagle feathers, and as he swung the feathers he softly sang the bear song.

"The young man is sick?" asked Crazy Horse.

"He is very sick, but I shall make him well after two sleeps," replied Scissors.

"Shunca-luta breaks a jug after the sun crosses Mato tipi."

"He talks like an old woman. He can not break jugs," scoffed Scissors. "After he tries and fails, and covers his head with his blanket, and is hiding in his lodge, let Tashunca-uitco remember what the white man told him."

Plainly disconcerted by this bold scepticism Crazy Horse withdrew.

To add to the tremendous excitement caused by the medicine-man's avowal three young men rode into the village shortly after the noon hour, returning from a scout between the Grand and Heart Rivers. They brought with them horrible trophies in the shape of human hands and feet tied to their lances. Their arrival was greeted with the firing of guns and much yelling and howling. The three ponies wore feathers in their tails and manes to show they had ably abetted their masters. The lances were passed over to the squaws to dance before being stuck up before the Strong Heart Lodge, to which the scouts belonged.

Alarmed by the noise Scissors stepped outside to investigate. Soon he was back, his face looking pale and sickly.

"Some poor —— of a soldier who strayed and got lost, or who wandered off hunting," he told Dinsdale. "Butchered. The village is crazy. It makes it bad for us. They've tasted blood. They won't be satisfied until they've wiped us out."

"If there was one soldier there must be more behind him," said Dinsdale hopefully.

"He was a soldier. They brought in enough of his clothes to prove that. Crazy Horse is in his lodge trying to figure out how many more there may be, and where they may be. I believe it means General Crook has struck the Little Missouri, or even the head of the Heart. I knew something would happen today. It's lucky for us that the scouts saw nothing of Crazy Horse's messengers to the Short Medicine Pole Hills. But they'll be coming back any time now. When things begin to break they come with a rush."

It was some time before the village quieted down sufficiently for public interest to revert to Sorrel Horse and his boast. The medicine-man, when he could gain a hearing, proudly proclaimed it was his new medicine that had enabled the young warriors to make their kill. The young girl who brought in their dinner was too overcome with excitement to answer any questions. At first Dinsdale refused to eat, but Scissors insisted until he swallowed some meat. Scissors would not let him leave the couch for fear some curious savage would spy on them and discover the truth.

After the shouting and dancing had ceased the *akacita* began parading through the village and crying: "Shunca-luta will make a new medicine, they say. *Hiyu po!* (Come on!) *Hiyu po!*"

As the camp police passed a lodge it was a signal for the inmates to come out and fall in behind them. Crazy Horse took his place and as the procession reached the prisoners' lodge he halted and looked inside and asked Scissors to come and witness the new medicine.

Continuing to fan Dinsdale the picture man ceased his chanting long enough to reply. "He has had an evil dream. The

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ghosts are fooling him. My white brother needs the bear song."

And he pointed down to the patient, who groaned and tossed about. The *akacita* went their way, calling on all the people to follow and do Sorrel Horse due honor; and the two lines of eager spectators including Crazy Horse made for the grassy slope.

Scissors watched their departure through the opening, and then made sure the adjacent lodges were empty. Darting to the back of the lodge he pulled away the bundles of antelope skins and made a peep hole with his scissors. Only two lodges stood between them and the bluffs, and neither showed any sign of life.

"Now we are ready," he whispered to Dinsdale.

Dinsdale came to his feet and started for the opening, but Scissors drew him back and closed the flap, and said—

"Out the back end will be better."

He dropped on his knees and had pulled a hide to one side when both were startled at the sound of a step by the entrance. Snatching up a kettle left by the girl he motioned for Dinsdale to gain the couch. But before Dinsdale could get in proper position the flap was pushed back and one of the *akacita* stuck in his head. He had noted the cessation of the sick man's moaning. He blinked his eyes to get rid of the sunlight and beheld Dinsdale stealing toward the couch. He opened his mouth to emit a yell when the kettle struck him on the back of the head, smashing the skull. As the man fell forward on his face, half inside the lodge, Dinsdale seized his shoulders and dragged him completely in, and Scissors dropped the flap.

"Now we must go no matter how many are outside," muttered Scissors.

They crawled under the back flap and bending low ran by the two lodges and began ascending a dry gulley. They reached the pine growth on top of the bluffs just as the Indians on the slope began yelling loudly. Dinsdale believed Sorrel Horse had succeeded with his jug-medicine. Scissors insisted the medicine-man could not reach the climax so soon, even if he forgot the warning that the medicine would not work unless the prisoners had time to reach the ponies.

"Some one must have returned to the village and discovered the dead guard. Probably a couple of them left to watch us," he nervously explained.

They scrambled up another terrace and came to a faint trail running to the south. From the elevation, also heavily wooded, they could look down on the village and the slope. That their escape was now known was proven by the Indians on the slope. The entire mass was dancing and shouting wildly, and waving arms. Then Scissors made out some new arrivals, a small band of warriors. All of these excepting the leader had dismounted. As Scissors stared at the mounted warrior he cried:

"American Horse! American Horse has returned. Look! He's pointing to the north, and brandishing his rifle. Now they're breaking to run back to the lodges. By heavens! The ponies are being brought up! It can mean only one thing! Crook's soldiers have reached the head of Heart River. Crazy Horse goes to stop him from making the Black Hills. They don't even wait for Shunca-luta to prove his medicine! Here's the trail! Now let's see your heels!"

THE loud outcry at the north end of the street, quickly swollen to a deafening chorus of yells and punctuated by a rapid discharge of hand-guns, caused more than one citizen of Deadwood City to fear that Crazy Horse and Sitting Bull were making good their threats and were sweeping into town at the head of their copper-colored hordes. But as the clamor reached Kitty the Schemer's place, swept on by Keno Frank's gambling-hall, and was added to by those in front of San Juan Joe's big tent, it took on a rude rhythm and at intervals burst into a reassuring staccato of wild cheering. Then the tents and building farther south knew something momentous had happened, but that no danger was imminent.

"The soldiers are coming! The soldiers are coming!" shrieked a woman from the second-story window of a store and tenement structure. This was accepted as the truth for a minute, as the woman's coign of vantage was much superior to those milling around in the street.

"No soldiers! Two men!" howled a boy from the top of a pine.

Then a solid mass of exclamatory humanity came into view, swallowing disorganized groups as fast as reaching them, and only the ill remained indoors. San

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an Joe rushed from his tent, rifle in hand. ıe front ranks broke and erupted to each le and allowed Scissors and Dinsdale to ınd revealed. With the yell of an Apache n Juan dropped his rifle and ran forward shake hands with the two men. Old ɾrites was another who fought his way rough the mob to add congratulations.

The procession came to a halt, for the reet ahead was filling with men and women ıd children. A man with mighty lungs ımbed to the top of a freight wagon and ɔllowed:

"Pete Dinsdale and Scissors, who we all ckoned had cashed in, escaped from the ıjuns and have come back. They say rook and his soldiers are on Heart River, ıat it's a race between him and Crazy ɔorse to see whether white or red gits here rst. American Horse's band is coming ɔm Slim Butte. Sitting Bull is expected ɔ join 'em with five thousand bucks. Our wo citizens were chased from Slim Butte to ıe Belle Fourche by a small band of ɔgalala. They killed their horses in the ıce and came the rest of the way on foot. Three cheers and a tiger!"

The cheers were given; more guns were ischarged. Mayor Farnum made his way o the escaped prisoners and shook each by he hand.

"We supposed you were dead," he said.

"All the credit for our being alive belongs o Scissors," said Dinsdale. "He knows nore about Injuns than Crazy Horse does."

"I'm *wakan*," spoke up Scissors. "Used o play in a Sioux village years ago. What did was nothing. But if Crook doesn't nake this gulch ahead of the Ogalala you vant to prepare for a lot of trouble."

"Make room so they can get in somewhere ınd rest," cried San Juan.

Still cheering, but not so boisterously ıow that Scissors had given his warning. he crowd parted and the gambler led the wo men into the tent and toward the hid- ıen entrance of his house. But Scissors at ɔnce responded to his environment and with ɔaper and scissors ready began searching ior customers.

It seemed to Dinsdale that a mask had dropped over Scissors' face the minute he got back among the tables; and never did he do such a trade as now. Instead of profiles he cut out lodges and ponies and other bits of Indian village life. These were eagerly snapped up as souvenirs by men who did not know whether they were to be victims of Teton cruelty, or live to welcome Crook. And each purchaser demanded more information as to how the two managed to escape.

"Always could do it," Scissors shrilly cried. "I'm *wakan witshasha*. We ran away when the Indians weren't looking. American Horse? Yes, we saw him when he came to lead his braves to the Heart. Crazy Horse? Certainly. He's the big man; stack him up against red or white and he's big— Four bits. Why weren't we killed off-hand? Why, I'm *wakan*, I tell you. Used to live in their villages. Then there was Dinsdale with some very pretty revolver magic. He's a cool one. Made Crazy Horse bung out his eyes. Yes, sir; four bits. Thank you."

San Juan Joe conducted Dinsdale to the rear room, and after sending a boy for a tray of drinks and making sure his guest was comfortably seated he exclaimed:

"Well, this knocks me! Can't make it real. When Pyrites came back without you and said you'd already started for here with Scissors, I knew something had happened. When he told about you making a big killing at cards and described the fellow I decided the agents had got you. Knocked him off his pins when he arrived and found you hadn't shown up. Now give me the story."

"First tell me about Jim Omaha. Has he been here?"

"To —— with Jim Omaha! Haven't seen any one that could be him. Give me the yarn."

Dinsdale told of his meeting the man Easy and winning his money; how he and Scissors ran away from Easy's gang only to fall into the hands of the Indians at Bear Butte. After sketching his experience among the Indians he dolefully added—

"And that little pleasure trip cost me four thousand dollars and leaves me without even a grub-stake."

"Four thousand is nothing," scoffed San Juan. "There is a big game waiting for you. A very big game. You didn't lose your nerve at Slim Butte?"

"Not my gun nerve," grimly retorted Dinsdale. "And what I want first of all is two Colt forty-fours. I brought a new Winchester forty-four from the butte. But I feel undressed without my hand-guns."

"You shall buy as good a brace as there

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is in Deadwood City. That means, as good as any in the world. You did mighty well to pull old Scissors out of the fire."

"Now get this right. He pulled me out. *Sabe?* He's an entirely different man among Injuns. I believe he's Injunized until he's more red than white. Not only knows their lingo like a book but he knows their different songs and secret societies. He says he used to live near one of their big villages and played with red youngsters when he was a boy. That was before his mind went back on him. In here he's half-witted. Matching wits against Sorrel Horse, the medicine-man, he's as smart as a Yankee peddler."

"I knew from pictures he cut out that he knew a lot about their village life. They caught him early this Summer and he was with them quite a while."

"I don't reckon he'd been in any danger at all if I hadn't been along. But, to get back to my present trouble. I'm broke——"

"Not while I have an ounce. And the tables have been doing mighty well, thank you. Little off now, but I don't care," said San Juan.

"I'll take enough for eats and drinks until I can make some real money. What's the big game you've been bragging about? Your message to Rapid City made me curious."

San Juan Joe studied the reckless face in silence for a full minute, then glided to the door and opened it quickly to make sure there was no eavesdropper. Returning to the table he poured out two drinks, and demanded—

"If you don't care to sit in will you promise never to tell what I'm about to tell you?"

"Think I'd spoil sport?" hotly asked Dinsdale. "If I don't sit in I'll never breathe it to a living soul."

"That's good enough for me. This is the game," and he leaned across the table and lowered his voice to a whisper. "Several business men in this town believe the hills are beginning to play out except for those who locate and develop quartz mines. They agree with me it'll be easy to hold up one of the treasure-coaches. Profit, two hundred thousand and upward. There! Now you know I'm a bad-man."

His black eyes bored into Dinsdale's to observe how he received the startling confidence. Dinsdale's face remained expressionless. He tasted his drink and said:

"If the ropes are rigged right it ought to be simple and easy. I could get the stuff alone. Getting away might be harder."

"Harder than the Ogalala job?" queried San Juan, and he grinned wickedly.

"This isn't any confessional," coldly retorted Dinsdale, his eyes half closing. "But every one knows, or ought to, that it's easier to hold up a stage than a train. A stage is boy's play. If I had my wad I'd gamble you I could slip on a mask and hold up any stage on the line with two corn cobs for guns—passenger-coaches, of course."

"By ——! I believe you," softly cried San Juan.

"Of course you've got all the necessary information?"

"A, B, C," assured the gambler. "There will be five of us, and you're to be one of the two to work on the inside. Does that scare you?"

"I don't scare," growled Dinsdale, beginning to look ugly. "Trying to make sure I've got my nerve? All I ask is to have my chance to get clear. There's only one man I don't want studying my face—Jim Omaha."

San Juan Joe laughed in deep satisfaction.

"You're my own kind," he said. "It'll net us at the least an even forty thousand apiece. If any of our number cashes in, his share will be evenly divided. And it's likely there will be more than two hundred thousand on the coach. Why, man! with your metal to back me I can find games better even than the treasure-coach! I'm through running a gambling-place. Keno Frank's been cutting into my trade. If it wasn't for the big game I'd have to clean him up—with cards or guns. But now I can see half a million apiece before we finish."

"Not so fast," quietly cautioned Dinsdale. "I must have a stake. I'll go in on this. I'll do inside work and take the big risk—but always providing the other men are all right. Who are the others?"

" 'Horseshoe' Webb will work on the inside with you."

"Just how? What are we to do? Explain," curtly demanded Dinsdale.

"He's hired as one of the guards. You'll be hired as another. There will be ten other guards. We've planned it so you two, working with the three of us, who will be in ambush, can take care of the ten guards and not shed a drop of blood."

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That's all right. Now who are the ers?"

I make the third man. Bud Roach n Crook City is the fourth. I can't tell ı who the fifth man is."

'Then it's all off and I'll forget all about just as I promised," declared Dinsdale. 'You'll know everything once we've got stuff. Even Horseshoe Webb or Roach sn't know Number One, the leader."

'Don't like it. Never did like going it ıd. When I tie up with a man to do risky rk I want to know his face, his heart. I nt to know him down to the ground," nly demurred Dinsdale.

'But you know *me*. If I vouch for the ef that ought to be good enough for you. ebb and Roach know me. I'm Number ro in the partnership. I give them their lers. But they're ignorant dogs. They ght talk too much when drunk. Say ey did and I got into a pickle. The chief, known, is left free to get me clear. You're ferent, of course. If you'd come from ıpid City when sent for the chief would ve been willing, perhaps, for you to know n before we work it. But it's too late w. After we've corraled the gold you'll ow him and like him.

"Dinsdale, that's the way the game lays d you'll have to take it or leave it. I'm rry, but I can't tell you any more. If was for me to decide I'd put all the cards wn face up. The chief will be there and ll hold the ribbons. You'll meet him ımediately after we've got the stuff."

Dinsdale swallowed his drink and pursed s lips thoughtfully. Finally he slapped s hand recklessly on the table and decided.

"All right. I drop. I'll go it blind, bank- g on you. I'm broke and haven't any ıoice. But it's the last time I work with- ıt knowing every man who's sitting in. ıfest way is to go it alone."

"Good!" cried the gambler. "I'll cir- ılate around and make everything ready. y tomorrow night I ought to know defi- itely when the coach is to start. We'll ope it'll be fat."

"They may hold it back till the soldiers ome?"

"If they could be sure the soldiers will et here ahead of the reds. As it is, Patrick t Saulsbury are threatening to pull off heir stages unless they can have an escort f troops. If it looks like the Indians will e buzzing around this gulch they'll start the treasure-coach at once. Depends on what they think the chances are. That's what I'm going to find out."

He turned to his desk and from behind a drawer pulled out a large bag of dust and tossed it on the table, saying:

"Spending money. Sorry it isn't greenbacks. I'll O. K. you at the tables so you can play on I. O. U.'s if you want action. We'll settle after dividing the gold."

"Just a word more. Bandy Allen? The man I killed. Was he one of the gang?"

San Juan laughed in deep amusement.

"We'd never trust a loose-tongued dog like that. He stuck up some stages, I reckon, but he worked alone, or with the Rapid City outfit."

"I knew he wasn't getting his dust by working. I tried to get away from the poor fool. But it was him or me."

"French Curly and Big George riled him up by telling him you had bluffed him in the Bed Rock. He thought he must get you to get back his reputation. You did a good turn for the town. It was a mistake for me to send you away. Instead of being fired up over it the people knew after a few hours that you weren't to blame. Why, some even talked of putting you in as marshal. Wild Bill was picked for that job, but McCall stopped him."

"If Wild Bill was marshal now I wouldn't want any of this treasure game. And if Jim Omaha blows in, and I know it, you needn't bother to hunt for me. I'll be gone for good."

"Bump! Omaha is overrated. Railroad man. No good up here on this kind of work. That word I got must have been a false trail."

THEY parted, Dinsdale going into the tent. Scissors was giving much of his attention to the big owl, Sitting Bull, and for the time being was quite indifferent to all offers for pictures. Dinsdale paused and attempted to talk with him but the man seemed to have slipped mentally and was slow to respond. On his way to the exit Dinsdale encountered Pyrites. Garrulous as ever and bubbling over with new projects the prospector clung to him and begged him to make one more trip into the hills.

"I know a vein-mine that'll be the talk of the territory," he mysteriously whispered.

"No use, Pyrites," laughed Dinsdale.

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"I'm poor medicine when it comes to hunting gold. There are only two pleasant things I remember about our trip: The dead Injun and the pretty girl who dealt Twenty-one at Calvin's place."

Pyrites was disconsolate over the refusal.

"The girl's up here," he informed. "She's dealing at Keno Frank's. Joey tried to get her, with Keno ready to shoot, and then quit cold. The boys say that other petticoat of a Kitty heard about it and put her foot down. French Curly tried to play in her game after she'd warned him off and she shoved the muzzle of a forty-four against his head and scared him stiff. She's bringing lots of trade to Keno's place."

"What became of Easy after I left Rapid City?"

"I remember him and some long-haired fellers riding out of town kerwhooping, but I'd had too many drinks to remember anything else. Reckon they was a bad lot. Reckon you had the right *sabe* about him."

Dinsdale shook him off and strolled down the street as far as the Grand Central Hotel and was the recipient of many congratulations over his escape. The hard feeling against him when he left town seemed to have vanished. As an escaped prisoner from the Ogalala his advice was eagerly sought by all who believed the red menace was fast approaching a climax.

He learned that several men had been killed in the outlying gulches during his absence. To all who talked with him, including Mayor Farnum and several of the city council, he repeated his belief that Crazy Horse and American Horse would strike at Crook's forces instead of making for the hills. And he added, as his belief, that Crook would stand them off and at the worst make a running fight of it and bring his soldiers down to the hills, where any disparity of numbers would be equalized for the whites.

This talk made a deep impression, especially as it did much to quiet the town's fears. The situation was rapidly approaching a pitch where the entire gulch would be thrown into a panic. After leaving the hotel and while walking to Keno Frank's place he was much startled to have two plump arms thrown around his neck. He hastily disengaged himself from the convulsive embrace and laughingly rebuked:

"Why, Lottie Carl! Right on the public street, too! What would the Widow Colt say?"

"I don't care!" she cried. "I'm mighty tickled to see you. Every one said you was killed. Besides, she's Mother Colt now. Aren't you coming to the house?"

"I can't now, Lottie."

"But I want you to," she persisted. "Mother Colt won't even like your speaking to me like this. I don't believe she knows you're out."

"She doesn't. But when I heard you were back I just had to look for you. But I reckon you ain't very glad to see me."

Proper food and clothing had done much for Lottie Carl, but seventeen was very youthful to Dinsdale. And yet he knew two or three short years might find him acting the seeker, and he wondered what she would think of him then.

"I'm more glad to see you than you can imagine, Lottie Carl," he gravely told her. "But I'm broke, and I haven't a right to see any girl. So you run along home——"

"I have money! Lots of it," she eagerly interrupted. "All that money they gave me when you brought me to this place. Come to the house——"

"Bless your heart! I can't rob children. As to coming to the house Mrs. Colt must have a better opinion of me first."

"But you've changed already. You're behaving better. Oh, I'm finding fault. I didn't mean you had to change."

"You're a good girl, Lottie Carl, and you're going to make a mighty fine woman. Do as your new mother says. Now you must trot along."

Her haste in turning from him caused him to fear she was sorrowing, and somehow the zest of picking up the town life was lost as he resumed his walk to Frank's place.

There was no mistaking the increase in play at the hall. Men were continually passing in and out and, on entering, Dinsdale found the floor around the tables uncomfortably crowded. But the largest gathering was around the Twenty-one game, although before the coming of the pretty French girl it had not been popular enough to be included among Keno Frank's offerings. Favorite with tenderfeet in the early Fifties it had gone into the discard before Seventy-six.

Now it was a magnet and miners and townspeople were packed several deep about the table, and it was only by persistent

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ort that Dinsdale could work close enough look down on the attractive dealer. ench Curly, barred from placing a bet, od close to her left, his cavernous eyes ver ceasing their steady scrutiny. With days numbered by the ravages of con- nption he stood by her side, a death's id.

In sweeping her gaze about to detect ofessionals the girl's glance found Dins- le, and there was a quick flash of interest the dark eyes, and the hand holding the ds gave a convulsive jerk. Then she s intent on her work, her head slightly wed, her soft voice calling the game.

Dinsdale was frowning heavily as he re- ned to the street. He walked absent- ndedly, with men good-naturedly giving n the way, until he happened to remem- r French Curly.

"Lucky he didn't know I wasn't heeled," muttered. And forthwith he entered the st store and bought two revolvers and ne ammunition. The guns made him l more like his old self and he proceeded the Bed Rock to secure a room. The terate landlord gave him a boisterous lcome and eulogized him for resisting the ractions of the Grand Central, and prom- d some most unusual "flour doin's" and hicken fixin's" for supper. Scissors, too, s there, and driving an active trade in per souvenirs. The men were very partial the profile of Crazy Horse. Dinsdale ked over a man's shoulder and was azed at the striking resemblance turned t by a few snips of the scissors.

He endeavored to retreat and go to his om, but Scissors saw him and caught his n and proudly informed him—

"I've been telling them about you."

Then in a sly aside:

"You'd think this place was full of Mr. sys by the way the dust is coming in. whole ounce in just this one place. ey're sending for me from all over town. and Central offered me my room and ard and all I can make. No percentage. , sir! But I'm sticking to San Juan. is business is falling off. Old Pyrites is re's a scalded pup to see me raking it in. akes his prospecting look sick. I'm going bring the trade back to San Juan even Keno Frank has that girl there. I'm ing there from here, cut a few pictures, en tell them they can follow me to where do business if they want my pictures.

"Yes, sir. The price is a dollar now. Demand is more'n I can fill. Thank you, sir. Now, gents, I'm going to turn out just one dozen more before I move on. After this you'll have to come to San Juan Joe's tent to get them. Always could do it. I'm *wakan*. I've forgot lots of things, but I know Indians. Who wants a picture of the great Crazy Horse, who reckons to raid this town very soon? First come, first served."

Pyrites, frowning severely, pushed his way to Dinsdale's side and secured his attention.

"Did that fool tell you Joey's talk?" he asked.

Receiving a negative Pyrites growled an oath and jeered:

"Might have known it. I don't see why Joey trusts him to do errands. He always forgits if he finds any one to listen to his yawp. Joey wants you to drop in and see him soon as you can. He sent Scissors to tell you. When you didn't show up he sent me. Every time a body sends Scissors on a errand he gits to mooning round with his cussed paper cutting."

"All right, Pyrites, I'll trot right along."

San Juan Joe was in the tent, walking among the various bank games. On beholding Dinsdale he motioned him to the bar and joined him at the lower end which happened to be deserted. After they had been served and the bartender had retired San Juan said:

"Rather talk here. Looks if we'd met by accident, you know. The game must be played on the jump. I went over to the express office to see about sending out some dust. Patrick & Saulsbury's agent has decided to take no chances on the Indians cutting the Black Hills off from the railroad and plans to send out the coach tomorrow. I've given Webb his last orders.

"I spoke to the agent about you, explaining how the Indians had cleaned you out and that you were keen for work. I dragged Scissors in off the street and made him tell about your gun-play among the Indians and the agent wants you for an extra. But we want better than that. You must take some one's place. I've arranged to have one of the regular guards filled up with scalp-talk, with plenty of drink on the side. He won't show up. All you've got to do now is to call on the agent and say I spoke to you. You know what to tell him."

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"I'll make a good talk. How much is going out?"

San Juan Joe's pale face colored slightly and his right hand gripped the bar to stop its tendency to tremble. He whispered:

"Two hundred and fifty thousand. Think of it! Quarter of a million! Sounds more the last way. Do it four times and it's a million. It'll be the biggest killing ever made in any mines at any time!"

"And there'll be a mighty hot chase to get it back."

"No! That's the beauty of it. This Indian scare will hold all the men to the gulch. The timid won't dare go in a posse and they won't let the men with sand go. They'll hold them by squalling about their duty to the women and children. But even if there wasn't any Indian scare it would work smooth. We'll pack the gold to a place where few white men have ever been. They could hunt a year with an army and not find us. You and Webb will clear out, riding for the railroad and then streaking out to the coast and meeting us later, or you can stay with the bullion in the hills and light out after every one thinks you've skipped. Roach, the chief, and I will be masked and will come back here. Talk with the agent and I'll explain later."

Dinsdale face darkened.

"You're all right, Joe. But I don't know your chief, the man you call Number One. I'll stick by the dust till I get my share of it."

"Glad to have you do that," readily agreed San Juan. "Horseshoe knows us and he prefers to ride for it and get his later. We plan to work together and do more work. We want you with us. You'll make a good one to guard the stuff. But it'll be lonesome work as we won't dare quit town for a month or six weeks."

"I never get lonesome when I have quarter of a million for company," said Dinsdale, with a grim smile. "And I ain't doubting your chief any. Your word goes for him as well as for yourself. But I always do hanker to keep close to my earnings. You're planning to stay here and sell out sort of natural, huh?"

"The selling out is already planned. I've been talking it for some time. Folks will think I'm off for South Africa with Kitty. She thinks I'm going with her. I had intended to. But I'm through with her."

"I thought you were helplessly in love with her."

"I am," groaned San Juan. "And that's why I'll not go to South Africa with her. She doesn't care for me except to have me stand by and scare off folks who bother her. No more watch-dog work for mine. I've had enough."

DINSDALE and Amos Roberts, the captain of the guard, rode in advance of the treasure-coach. Throughout the hills and at the various ranches, or stations, relays of horses had been waiting for a month. Horseshoe Webb, sitting his horse awkwardly, was one of the eight men galloping along beside the coach. A few hundred feet in the rear came two more guards. All the men carried their rifles ready for instant service although no attack, in the hills at least, was expected. Good time was made over the corduroy road, and none of the twelve men observed anything to arouse suspicion. Ten of the guards had made the trip several times and scoffed at the idea of road-agents daring to try for the gold. The holding-up of one consignment and the theft of twenty-five thousand dollars only proved it was foolish to send out treasure under a guard of two men.

Roberts admired Dinsdale immensely because of his exploits among the Ogalalla. Credit for the escape from Slim Butte was given almost entirely to him despite his insistence that Scissors deserved all the praise. Deadwood City could imagine the picture-man in only one rôle, a harmless and very clever pedler of paper pictures. So Dinsdale's vehement disclaimers were accepted as the workings of modesty.

Roberts elected to ride with the new man and he kept his tongue wagging incessantly. Dinsdale listened. Shrewdly appraising the man and concluding that the fellow would know no fear in an emergency, but would be easily deceived. Among other gossipy things Roberts said there would have been thirteen guards if one of the regulars hadn't been intoxicated when it came to pull out from the gulch.

"And thirteen is unlucky. I'm mortal glad he quit. Not enough agents in the hills to hold up this outfit," he boasted.

"I should say not. Guarding a coach is soft money. Injuns may give us some fun, but the agents will think twice," replied Dinsdale.

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t Rapid City fresh horses were ready. coming of the coach caused but little :est. It carried much wealth, securely ·ded. The agents wanted none of that e. But the town was most anxious to ı the latest Indian news, as extrava- : stories of danger had been relayed ·olunteer and irresponsible messengers. guards were eagerly questioned. Was :y Horse camping on the Belle Fourche? Sitting Bull cut off the Bismarck and : Pierre Trails with a force of six thou- l braves? Was there any truth in the ·rt that the bulk of Crook's command suffered the fate of Custer's five com- ies? On receiving reassuring answers e persisted in believing the sending out he gold evidenced a fear of an early ck. One man bitterly complained:

They'll take out the dust under guard, they don't fix it so the women and dren will be safe. Gold's more precious a human life."

We've got to be in Sidney in fifty hours. long," shouted the driver as the last :e was secured; and the long whip :ked over the leaders and the coach ıged ahead.

With the Spring Creek crossing ahead the : guard rode in closer. Horse-thieves e reputed to have their headquarters iewhere on the divide between the Spring Rapid, and while it was not generally eved that the horse-thieves and road- nts belong to the same band it would be y for lawless men to desert one vocation another when a quarter of a million lars was involved. Dinsdale had hung k with the main body, but after the first) miles he gave Horseshoe Webb a signal follow him and galloped on in advance. bb pounded after him and was riding by side when the two turned a wooded bend l were lost to view. Roberts heard Dins- e call out sharply and spurred forward investigate. He found Dinsdale afoot l trying to lift Webb back on his horse

'Nag stumbled and threw him. Never :d to save himself. Landed like a bag meal, right on his head."

'Leave him lay till the coach comes up d we'll stick him inside. —— of a guard!" owled Roberts.

They had gone too far to take him back Rapid City and, failing to find a camp of ners on Spring or Battle Creeks it would necessary to take him through to Custer City on French Creek. The man was unconscious but breathing in a stertorous manner. Roberts examined him and pronounced it to be a fracture on top of his head. Dinsdale was more optimistic and said the skull was not broken.

Disposing of him they resumed their way, Roberts now riding ahead with Dinsdale. Heretofore Roberts had done most of the talking. Now Dinsdale gestured for him to pay sharp attention and began to talk. Roberts was powerless for several minutes to speak even when his companion became silent. Again Dinsdale spoke, curtly and incisively.

"That's all. Don't ask any questions. Ride back. Soon we'll come to a sapling across the road."

Pivoting his horse Roberts galloped madly back to the coach. Dinsdale dismounted and walked on the right of his horse, his eyes searching the road ahead. A quarter of a mile brought him in sight of a sapling lying across the road. He shifted his gaze to the bush growth just beyond this and came to a stop. From behind him came the faint throb of racing hoofs, each moment growing more audible. A masked figure leaped from the bushes ahead and gently called out:

"—— you, Dinsdale! You've betrayed us."

As the fellow spoke up went his gun and as it exploded two shots from the bushes roared out. The horse went down, shot through the head. Around spun Dinsdale, his right arm helpless. He began firing with his left hand and the man in the road swayed wildly but doggedly continued working the trigger although his lead went wild of the mark. As he collapsed a muffled scream rang out from the bushes, a howl of rage rather than pain, and there was a crashing in the underbrush as men hastily rode away. Roberts dashed up with half of the guards, shooting into the woods at random. Three men ran to the prostrate man and pulled off his mask. Dinsdale forced himself to look. It was the man known as Easy, and a red welt showed through the clipped hair where Dinsdale had struck him down in the cellar of the horse-thieves' rendezvous.

"And Joe said his name was Roach. Roach of Crook City," cried Dinsdale with a hysterical laugh. He grabbed a horse by the bridle and crawled into the saddle.

"Stop! Don't let him go! He's hurt!"

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howled Roberts, and he made a dash to seize the bridle. But the horse jumped ahead and tore down the road.

As Dinsdale swept around the next bend he glimpsed a figure crashing into cover on his right, and he knew the fugitives had crossed the road and were making for their hiding-places on the divide. He sent his horse through the alders and hazel and gained the foot of a long slope where the growth was pine and spruce and more open.

One horseman was riding into a dry gulley. Another had elected to take a trail leading along the south bank of the gulley. As the man in the gulley was the easier to follow Dinsdale turned his attention to him. He heard the sound of another horseman crashing through the growth to the north of him and from the rapidity of his advance it was obvious he was descending, rather than ascending, the slope. This puzzled Dinsdale as he did not believe any of the guard had had time to get above him.

As he drove his mount into the gulley he gave a last look for the newcomer. Then the bank of the dry water-course shut off all view except that straight ahead, and the singing of a rifle bullet from the top of the south bank warned him of a double danger. A bit of smoke on top of the bank revealed the source of the shot, but of the marksman, or of the quarry ahead, Dinsdale had yet had no glimpse. He swung in toward the south bank to get under cover and a second shot whistled close to his head.

His horse scrambled desperately over the rough footing, making slow progress; then a gun cracked ahead and Dinsdale owed his life to the tough bough that deflected the bullet. Slipping from his horse Dinsdale ran in under the bank, and, shielded from the man above began working forward.

The firing from the bank continued, and Dinsdale was puzzled until he heard answering shots from behind him. He glanced back but could see no one, and decided the man he had heard crashing down the slope must be one of the guards, miraculously arrived to aid him.

Thankful to have the attention of the hidden rifleman fully occupied, Dinsdale managed to draw his right-hand gun with his left hand. The firing above and behind him grew violent, a whole magazine being discharged in a string, and indicating each man was trying to drive the other from cover.

Dinsdale crouched low as he turned a shoulder to a mighty rock and beheld his horse on the ground. The poor brute had done his best to save his rider but had fallen and broken his leg. A gun blazed from a clump of hazel and the lead left a long smear on the rock against which Dinsdale was leaning.

Dinsdale frantically worked forward behind a boulder and yelled:

"Give it up, Joe. I'll see you're taken out of the hills and get a square shake."

"You —— traitor!" hoarsely cried San Juan Joe.

"Give in," insisted Dinsdale. "You sent Bandy Allen on to me so I could do your dirty work. You lied about Roach. You knew Easy had it in for me. It's even Stephen. I must have you, but I'll see you have a square——"

A bullet ricochetted and cut a furrow through the hair and brought blood. "I tried to help you, Joe," cried Dinsdale; and he staggered from behind the boulder.

San Juan Joe had correctly interpreted the desperate firing down the gulley. He knew he must be climbing the rocks and into the hills before more reenforcement arrived. As he beheld Dinsdale staggering and reeling, with one arm hanging helpless he raised a savage shout and broke from the bushes, shooting with both hands.

Dinsdale went down on his knees with a red hot iron through his chest. He called upon his strength for a final effort and fired twice with his left hand. San Juan Joe came to a halt, looked vastly surprized, and went down on his face. Dinsdale's strength deserted him. He knew he was hurt but was not greatly interested. He knew he had killed San Juan Joe and was sorry it had to be. He was also conscious of a rattle of gravel and stones and the sound of a heavy object crashing down the slope to a halt just back of him. He felt fingers thrust aside his shirt to examine his wound, but was wonderfully detached from all concern about himself.

The whole situation was very impersonal to him. He heard an exclamation and thought the voice was familiar. Then strong arms lifted him up until his head and shoulders were propped against a rock. Then feet from him Iron Pyrites was sprawled on his back, his questioning blue eyes staring whimsically at the heavens.

"Are you the Peter Dinsdale mentioned in this letter written to Wild Bill Hickok

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and which I find in your pocket?" asked a voice.

"We were to work together," mumbled Dinsdale. "Wild Bill knew the company was sending a man. The letter was to identify me."

He closed his eyes as a stabbing pain suddenly reminded him he was yet capable of suffering. There was the salty taste of blood in his mouth."

"Well, I'll be shot!" softly exclaimed the voice. "On the wrong track from the start. Thought you did the Ogalala job."

With an effort Dinsdale opened his eyes. Scissors, still holding the letter of introduction, stood staring blankly at the wounded man. Then he gently said:

"You're badly hurt. But I must know more about this while you can talk. You work for Patrick & Saulsbury?"

Dinsdale nodded his head.

"You were after road-agents?"

Another nod. In deep disgust the picture-man exclaimed:

"And I thought you did the Ogalala job! The greenbacks fooled me. San Juan Joe rode out of the hills and fetched you back with him."

Dinsdale managed to explain:

"Patrick gave me five thousand—greenbacks. I was to play bad-man—reckless stuff— Get into confidence of crooks up here. Joe thought I was train-robber. Hated to get Joe. Pyrites? What happened?"

"I shot him. He was the leader. Known as Number One. Brains of the outfit. A bad-man wherever he's been. Beastly bad in Montana. Played prospector to perfection. Used to get tenderfeet to go out with him. They always got lost, or "killed by Indians." Then he outgrew such small games and worked big jobs. My helper, the little French-Indian girl, who deals Twenty-One at times, heard stuff dropped by Easy at Rapid City. She got Webb to talk when he was drunk. She guessed Pyrites ahead of me.

"But I'll be eternally jiggered if you didn't fool me complete! Now I'll get a horse and pack you down to the road. I was watching from up the divide. Have a big French Creek posse just below here ready to comb the hills if the job was tried this side of the Spring. The man Easy worried me. I knew he was a horse-thief, or something, but his singing 'Joe Bowers' puzzled me. I knew it meant something, but couldn't tell what. My helper said he was expecting some one he didn't know, and the song would identify him."

Dinsdale's eyes lighted and he broke in:

"Easy knew San Juan Joe. Didn't know Number One. Joe sent word the chief would meet him at Rapid City. They were to recognize each other by singing. It was Pyrites, pretending to be drunk and singing back at him that told him he was Number One—for him not to take a fight to me."

"If I'd only known about you! If you'd only told Mayor Farnum!"

"Didn't dare tell a soul. Didn't know Number One myself— Had to work alone. Knocked Webb off his horse. Told guards he fell. Didn't dare tell Roberts what was up till I'd sounded him—just before we came to the show-down. Everything cleared up but one—*now who the —— are you?*"

Scissors turned to get his horse, then halted and called back over his shoulder:

"Who? Me? Why, I'm Jim Omaha."

THEY said he would surely die. Mrs. Colt and Lottie Carl said he must live. The agent for Patrick & Saulsbury received orders to spare no expense in rounding up all available members of the medical profession in the hills. The head and arm wounds were not dangerous, but the hole through the lung was most serious. He would die, he might live, were the alternating reports on the street. Finally an Eastern practitioner, rough of garb and wild with whiskers, was discovered in Whitewood gulch and brought to the sick man.

He remained on duty for forty-eight hours, heavily subsidized by the stage-coach company, and then announced the invalid had a chance if he could be kept quiet. Mrs. Colt and Lottie Carl were his nurses. Gradually he began to improve and on the sixteenth day of September stood an excellent chance of recovering.

The sixteenth of September was the first day he was left alone for a minute; and he was aroused from fitful sleep by the sound of guns and loud yelling. The gun volleys became more violent. Dinsdale knew what it meant. Crazy Horse was trying to sweep the gulch. At the head of the bed hung his belt and the two hand-guns. He secured the weapons and slipped out on to the floor and dragged himself to the window. There

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Scissors and Mrs. Colt found him, collapsed, one of the guns cocked.

When Dinsdale recovered consciousness Scissors gently rebuked him.

"Why did you go to the window? Taking a chance like that!"

Dinsdale faintly explained.

"Always looking for action, Peter," sighed Scissors. "What you heard were the citizens celebrating over General Crook's arrival in town. Every one is safe now. The Sioux will never sweep the hills."

The next morning the doctor said the patient was not much the worse for his exertions. Lottie Carl, who had wept all night because she believed she had neglected him by running out to look at the half-famished troopers ending their "horse meat" march from the head of Heart River, wept anew with boundless joy. Scissors broke in on the tearful scene and spoke with the doctor aside. Then he advanced to the bed and took Dinsdale's left hand and said:

"I've finished the Ogalala job. The man Easy did it. But neither Pyrites, nor San Juan Joe knew it. He kept it from them so he would not have to divide. Pyrites and San Juan were in the plot to kill Wild Bill. San Juan knew what was coming and left the hills so as to be away from Deadwood when McCall committed the murder. I believe he rather dreaded returning until he heard that McCall had been allowed to escape.

"Pyrites, also, was away from town until it was all over. I'm going out with General Crook. The general is ordered to move in to Red Cloud and Spotted Tail agencies and disarm the hostiles, who are coming in in great numbers. Crazy Horse failed in his attack and American Horse is dead from a wound received at Slim Butte. Horseshoe Webb goes out with us a prisoner, but I fear we can't hold him as there is no corroborating evidence. The crack you gave him over the head saves him from prison."

"Can't you wait a bit. I'll go with you," murmured Dinsdale.

"Not a day. The Union Pacific is calling me by every incoming stage. Now you're on the mend I must go. I never can forgive myself for being fooled by you, Pete. It was your lavish way of spending greenbacks. I never dreamed Patrick & Saulsbury had sent a man up here. Miss Linsey, my helper who sometimes deals Twenty-one, insisted you were straight. She couldn't give any reason, and I never bank on instinct or intuition. So I wasn't so *wakan* as I reckoned." And he grinned whimsically. Then he gravely added. "Always could do it. Four bits, gents. I'm *Wakan wi-shasha.*"

"And me pretending to San Juan Joe that Jim Omaha was the only man I feared and never guessing the truth! Good-by, Scis—Jim Omaha. Believe me, you're the most *wakan* galoot I ever met. I'll never forget Slim Butte."

Scissors turned from the bed and bruskly took Lottie Carl's brown hand and stared at her intently. Facing toward the bed he savagely demanded—

"And what about this little lady?"

Dinsdale's emaciated face was lighted with a rare smile as he explained—

"She doesn't know it yet, but after she's older and has had a chance to go to school, and has learned her own mind, I'm going to ask her to marry me."

"Good talk! You're *wakan—Taku wakan* has been whispering to you," warmly declared Jim Omaha. "Good-by."

THE END

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Jack of Clubs

By Ben F. Baker

Author of "Goo Lash," "Tillicums," etc.

STANDIN' in line in front of a theater the other night, I overhear a lot of wranglin' between the ticket clerk an' a prospective patron whose foolish an' futile remarks don't do nothin' more'n delay the game.

This here peeved an' persistent citizen holds up that whole string of impatient customers while he explains to the box-office man that the tariff on a aisle seat, first row center, is 'way too high. Also he insists that the war-tax on the aforesaid front-line chair is exorbitant, ridiculous an' a outrage, an' ought to be paid by the house an' not by him.

The dealer in the little booth contributes his share of the debate by chippin' in at regular intervals with, "How many, please?" in a bored an' dronin' voice that finally gets the *hombre* outside so jumpin' mad that he planks down his *dinero* an' yells, "One!" exactly like he's a umpire callin' strikes on a batter he don't like. He gets his little pasteboard, an' he stalks through the main door, his face red, his eyes bulgin' an' his mind firmly made up not to enjoy that performance, even if them actors makes him laugh once a minute.

After which, the rest of us hopefuls shuffles forward, acquires our tickets an' passes inside with nothin' more'n a feelin' of relief an' tolerance toward that choleric swell-head. We're out to be amused, an' we aim to have our desires gratified, in spite of high prices an' annoyin' interruptions. We're kin that way to 'most all folks, everywhere. We're, all of us, ever ready to be cheered up an' entertained, an' hang the expense. Which reminds me of J. Wallpole Frost an' his Cooperative Thespians an' Community Op'ry-House.

THIS here J. Wallpole drifts into Manook 'long toward the middle of August. He slides up to our landin' on a big double-ender scow which he's got loaded to the gunnels with a wife, a half-growed youngster an' a top-heavy pile of sacks, boxes an' other etcetery. Not referrin' to his family none, it's a mystery how he ever pilots that mountain of junk down the river.

The scow no more'n hits the beach till Wallpole jumps ashore, scrambles up the bank an' goes up the street like he's got to deliver a telegram. He's in a big hurry.

"Where is she?" he demands of "Missouri Bill," who is the first *hombre* he meets.

"I ain't seen her," Bill tells him.

There's a wild look in this newcomer's eye that cautions Bill to take no chances.

"You must have," Mr. Frost insists. "Everybody knows where she is. What you givin' me?" he demands, real hostile.

"I ain't givin' you nothin'," Bill informs him, slow an' careful. "I need everything I got for my friends an' my own self," he adds, hitchin' his belt round a little.

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From top to bottom Wallpole looks Missouri over, cool an' deliberate.

"Them up-river coots sure lied to me," he declares, scornful. "They done painted me a picture of this camp an' its denizens that's sure a heap too bright an' rosy. Here's me, landin' on this foreign strand with my wife an' son an' other chattels, hurryin' ashore after four days' steady driftin' in that blame mud-ark, a-dyin' for a drink an' askin' for nothin' more'n the location of the Pioneer, which every male man on this here Yukon River knows said saloon personal or by hearsay; an' you up an' refuse to divulge her whereabouts.

"Fair enough. I'll find her myself, an' after a while, or maybe a little later, I'm goin' to resume my journey an' depart away from such a narrow-minded an' selfish village. I refuse to abide within these constricted environs, even on a bet."

"You're wise, at that," Bill agrees. "Now's the time to mush, while the water's runnin' an' the goin's easy. Furthermore, I don't pay no attention to the aspersions you jes' cast at this metropolis. We're that secure in our own esteem that we rank right up alongside of Boston in bein' self-satisfied an' exclusive. We're a close corporation, an' no stock's for sale.

"But, as a middlin' fair sample of the manhood an' citizenry of Manook, I'm takin' it on to myself to correct some of your impressions regardin' this fair city an' to apologize for havin' read your desires wrong. I'm now invitin' you to amble along to the Pioneer under my guidance an' escort. I aim to buy you-all a present."

"I knew right from the very first that this little misunderstandin' terminates jes' this way," Wallpole declares. "Let's hurry. Maybe she don't taste so good if we lingers too long in this damp air. An'," he continues, linkin' his arm into Missouri's, "while I'm swallerin' my first hasty remarks I want to add that it's more'n likely that I light right in the middle of this here town for keeps."

Durin' the next hour Missouri's new acquaintance meets maybe half of our prominent an' more obtrusive citizens. An' he sure establishes hisself solid. At the start he drags out a measly poke containin' maybe two ounces, an' he slaps her on to the bar.

"When that's gone, lemme know," he commands Rory Mack.

Which Rory does, soon—an' thereafter frequent. He notifies Mr. Frost immediate when the sack goes flat. By and by he notifies him again. But Wallpole merely nods an' goes on gettin' acquainted. He's got the center of the floor from the time he buys the first drink, an' he more'n hangs onto it. He's in the limelight, an' he proposes to stay there. An' he certainly does inform an' instruct us as to his antecedents an' achievements. Likewise he keeps on treatin' all hands.

He's called us all to the bar maybe six times after his little bag of dust melts away when Rory calls a halt.

"You see, stranger," he explains to Wallpole, "I buy this here whisky. That is to say, I pays for it—money. I'm sorry; but if I let you keep on presentin' it to your new friends indefinite thisaway I'm goin' to fail to collect *dinero* enough to buy me a new stock. An' you can surely see that without no money an' no hooch too, it's goin' to be awful hard for me to keep this pitfall open an' runnin'.

"At that I want to compliment you-all. You is easy the most absorbin' gent that props hisself ag'in my bar since I first open up. I never see nobody imbibe strong liquor so fast an' frequent an' show so few signs of saturation. You're a marvel. It's my belief you-all can drink with either hand. I'd be obliged if you an' your new *compadres* would have one on me."

"For myself an' my friends, I accept," Wallpole answers, plumb dignified. "An' I wish to remark, I fully appreciate your delicacy an' your complimentary language. I'm now about to return to my floatin' home where I've got a wife an' son a-waitin' for me an' wonderin' whatever.

"An' let 'em wonder. Guessin' about me thataway keeps 'em pleasantly occupied an' don't cost nothin'. An' every time I return home, I surprizes 'em by appearin' either sooner or later than what they figured on, thereby providin' 'em with plenty of uncertainty an' keepin' 'em from lookin' on life as jes' one monotonous grind. They never know what to expect, an' that's jes' what they always get. *Adios, señors*, an' *muchas gracias* for a full an' overflowin' session."

"Any time I got two patrons with the same capacity an' desires as that *hombre*," Rory remarks soon as Wallpole is gone, "I easy make a stake in one Winter. Even though they don't pay for no more'n half their drinks. Two cash contributors like

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that loquacious an' eloquent freak, an' I retire to a life of respectability an' regret in less'n six months. I sure do wish that galoot plenty luck an' prosperity durin' his residence in this camp," he fervently adds, settin' out a round of glasses.

NEXT day J. Wallpole starts in makin' good his threat to locate. He rustles him a empty cabin, an' with about ten of his recent acquaintances he proceeds to move his possessions ashore. He tears up an' down the bank from his scow to his shack, directin' an' exhortin' his friends to hurry an' get all his plunder moved before night. Which it bein' mid-Summer an' the nearest night still a-foolin' around out in space a couple of months away, it looks to me like Wallpole has misread his hand.

But his assistants don't seem to notice it. Neither do they appear to observe that Wallpole makes all his numerous trips from scow to cabin without once bearin' a burden or carryin' a load. He's the superintendent, an' he devotes his entire time an' energies to urgin' everybody else to work. At that, he's plenty busy.

Right after his traps has been safely cached in his new abode, he shoos all hands down to the Pioneer, hangs out the sad eye, an' succeeds in razzin' Rory out of three applications of exhilaratin' oil for hisself an' helpers. After which he makes a speech.

"Fellow citizens an' gentlemen," he begins, "havin' completed the removal of my family an' other duds to a permanent roostin'-place, I'm now ready to announce my reasons for selectin' this bustlin' city as the scene of my future activities. First off, I want to state that I'm a philanthropist. It makes me feel good to see folks cheerful an' happy. I'm plumb contented when everybody around me is lit up with joy.

"Therefore, when I learn up-river that this camp is overflowin' with *dinero* an' the promise of more; when I hear that you-all boasts two creeks with pay-dirt into 'em an' two more that prospects better'n average, I decide immediate to land myself in your midst an' camp here permanent.

"An' I come with a purpose."

"Not draggin' in no family affairs, I got to go back a few years an' say that I marries up with my wife back in Colorado, 'long about a year before that son of mine is born. I wins her away from a travelin' show wherein she's the leadin' lady. That there spouse of mine, gentlemen, is a actress, an' a good one.

"By the time I recover from my honeymoon an' learn for a fact that the sweetest apple dumplin' ain't nothin' more'n dough on the outside, I'm broke. Which my trade is prospectin'.

"Without botherin' you with no details, I'll say that I stand off a storekeeper gent in Pueblo for a grubstake, load my wife on to my own ridin'-burro an' start out. An' I been goin' ever since. Over into Montana, across into Idaho an' Washington, up through B. C., back to Washington an' finally into this here land of hope an' despair, I drag my weary feet from the last grubstake on to the next place where there's a chance of standin' off some grub-pedler for another one.

"An' all the time an' continuous, over desert an' mountain, swamp an' ridge, that helpmate of mine passes her wakin' hours bemoanin' her lot. She's forever lamentin' about her free an' joyous life former to the time when I induces her to abandon same. She's eternally harpin' on what she calls the 'show business' an' insistin' that said game is a broad, smooth trail to comfort an' wealth with plenty ease an' excitement along the way. She coaxes me perpetual to settle down an' embark into some kind of amusement swindle wherein she can do some actin'.

"She even trains our son. That offspring of ours no more'n learns to lisp before she starts learnin' him pieces. An' she keeps at it. She coaches an' teaches him day after day an' year after year until she gets him so trained that he plays anything from a Chinaman to a duke. She even harnesses him into dresses an' learns him to imitate females, takin' in everything from a bally dancer to a washerwoman.

"Sometimes I busts in on their playactin', an' it frequent puzzles me to tell whether that *muchacho* of mine is a old maid or a villain with a black mustache. Or maybe he's his own sister.

"An' all the time my frow is diggin' into me to quit ramblin' around an' go into the show business. She hammers so hard an' steady that finally I agree. So here's what I figger to do:

"I aim to provide this here village with recreation an' amusement by establishin' an' maintainin' a op'ry-house an' a cooperative

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company of play-actors to cavort therein. Me an' the town builds an' owns the theatre, an' the cooperative clowns labors for me an' themselves, share an' share alike. We disperse entertainment an' enjoyment in such doses as to make the long dreary Winter nothin' more'n a short season of hilarity an' joy. We sure knock loneliness an' ong-way into a cocked hat."

"Any time that you dispel away any gloom that may be hoverin' over our fair landscape, I'm for an' with you," Missouri Bill assures Wallpole. "But I firmly decline to lend myself to any scheme that aims to glean a hunk of personal vengeance for you-all. I ain't got no interest in your feud with this here Ong Way. More'n that, you lowers yourself by harborin' malice again' a Chinaman."

"Without holdin' up your ignorance to the ridicule she deserves, I'll state that this here ong-way ain't nothin' at all. She's jes' a French word meanin' tired an' lonely an' bored. I gets her off of my wife, who suffers constant from this here high-toned an' imaginary malady," Wallpole explains.

"Tomorrow," he goes on, "I'm goin' to pole up-river a ways an' start cuttin' a set of logs ample to build up a thirty-by-sixty shack. You-all helps me to raft 'em down. Then we erect our temple of mirth. We gets her done before the first snow.

"An' I want to say right here that every galoot that helps on the construction of this mummers' hut wins the right to become a shinin' light in our galaxy of actin' stars. We all work together; an' we sure accumulate a whole heap of recreation an' gather plenty shekels at the same time."

"I'm out to say that she sounds good to me," "Scar-Face Ed" declares. "You-all put me down right now now as a earnest an' willin' worker in this here noble effort to uplift the stage.

"Moreover, I welcome this chance to display my histr'onic accomplishments. All my life I been honin' for a chance to turn my dramatic gifts loose on a admirin' public. I jes' nacher'lly feel that I was born to blink in the glare of the footlights. Once I get started, dramatic, this community gets surprized to the verge of shock."

"Likewise me," Dick Peters chimes in. "I'm in on this deal with a pat hand. An' I warn you-all that I'm out to win. This here game is goin' to be duck-soup for me. I'm a born artist. Back in Illinoy, when I wasn't no more'n maybe eight or nine years old, I used to speak pieces, right out loud, in the public Sunday-school. An' I ain't forgot 'em. I'm primed an' ready to shoot, any time. I'm loaded for bear. Here's where I climbs to fame in two jumps."

Well, sir, it's jes' nothin' short of astoundin' how them galoots swallers Wallpole's talk. Every last one of 'em crowds round an' assures Mr. J. W. Frost that they're with him from mush to beans an' back ag'in. The whole bunch enrolls, then an' there, as members of Wallpole's outfit, an' promises to contribute time, labor an' anything else that's necessary to the scheme to enliven our long, monotonous Winter.

An' it ain't with any hope of gain, financial, that they enlist under the banner of Thespis. Not any. For while any *dinero* that comes floatin' into their treasure-chest on the high tide of public approval—which all hands is sure will rise—them enthusiasts horns in on this proposition expectin' nothin' more'n a chance to cut up in public.

At that, it's a common an' universal failin'. Sometime or other everybody, all over the world, yearns for show to be a play-actor. It's human nature to want to pretend to be somethin' that you ain't; an' nothin' but Ridicule an' her cousin Modesty saves the public from a ever flowin' stream of struttin', mouthin', wild-eyed lunatics.

WALLPOLE'S undoubtedly in good. He's sure the dealer in his own hand-picked game. Before the evenin' gives way to breakfast time he's got the promise of mighty near half the camp. An' they're stronger than horseradish for him. He's easy the most popular gent in town.

Next day Wallpole borrows a boat an' poles a couple of miles up-river to where there's a thick stand of cabin logs growin' close to the bank. Then he comes home.

That night he meanders into the Pioneer an' informs his cohorts that if they turns to an' cuts them logs the show-house gets built jes' that much quicker. He explains that many hands means light work an' that the sooner the drama gets installed into her own teepee, the nearer we get to the glorious day when the doubloons begin to roll into the box-office. An' he wins again.

Next mornin' about twenty pop-eyed coots departs for Wallpole's timber-patch,

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carryin' grub, blankets an' axes. Three days later they ride up to our landin' on the biggest raft of house-logs that ever enters our busy harbor.

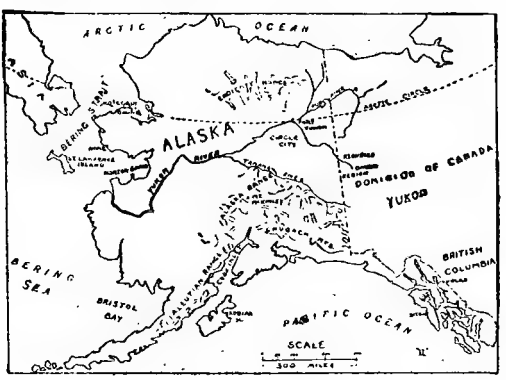
By this time Wallpole's got 'em plumb hypnotized. That whole loony bunch abandons everything but the drama uplift from then on. They turn to an' they yank them logs out of the river, an' they start buildin' immediate.

In less'n thirty days, them hard-workin' imbeciles has done throwed up a thirty-by-sixty buildin' with eighteen-foot walls an' hewed corners; an' I got to acknowledge they done a skookum job. She certainly is one of the best built, neatest wickiups I ever see. She's floored with whip-sawed lumber, an' she's got a stage into one end of her that spans twenty feet either way, an' she'll easy seat two hundred. Which, as Manook don't census no more'n two hundred an' fifty souls after countin' in nigh onto a hundred Injuns, means plenty space an' elbow-room for everybody.

Wallpole stands off old Jack for a couple of bolts of light muslin, an' with Dutch Bill doin' all the work he paints up a lot of scenery. Dutch Bill labors at sign-paintin' before he migrates North, so the scenery is fair to middlin'. Some of it's real good, one set in particular bein' well done an' useful. She's supposed to be a kitchen with white plaster walls, an' by hangin' a white rag over the window, Wallpole declares it's easy to use her for the inside of a white marble masoleum.

The actual toil an' labor bein' now completed, Wallpole makes his next move. An' she is sure a wise an' diplomatic play. He calls his cooperative clan together an' tells 'em that school is out for six weeks. It's recess. He goes on to explain that, bein' aware that most of his pupils is the possessors of payin' claims, he deems it advisable for all hands to depart to their several holdin's an' extract what dust they can in the short time remainin' to 'em before the freeze-up. He allows that he don't aim to hog all of their time an' labor, an' that moreover they'll likely need some coin of the realm before the water runs ag'in. Most of 'em is tolerable well heeled already; but like a bunch of kindergarten babies them loons mushes away to the diggin's, same like Wallpole tells 'em. By this time them locos is that fascinated by the glamour of the footlights they're willin' to climb a tall tree an' jump off, any time J. Wallpole Frost tells 'em to. It's uncanny.

WELL, the freeze-up comes. The old Yukon spreads her ice-blanket cross her placid bosom an' retires to slumber an' rest for the usual seven months. We're tied up an' shut in. No more papers nor magazines nor fresh spuds; at the most, not more'n two times will we get any letter mail until June swings round ag'in an' floods our fair land with sunshine an' muskeeters. So far as we're concerned, Seattle is jes' as far away as Cape Town.



But we ain't kickin'. We got Wallpole. An' Wallpole is there with bells. Right after the river quits runnin' mush-ice an' closes up solid, Mr. J. W. Frost sends out word to his disciples to come on in. The day approaches when all hands lays hold of the drama an' tosses her high into the view of an' admirin' populace.

An', believe me, the call is answered. Them stage-struck dodos comes swarmin' into town like they was bound for a fire.

Soon as his tally of victims is complete Wallpole calls a meetin', announces the name of the first play he expects to perpetrate, an' names a day for the first rehearsal. He explains that he's chose a bill that fits the parties what expects to portray same; a minin'-camp drama introducin' the types we all understands an' is familiar with.

He goes on to say that this here three-act story of the virile an' vivid West has got prospectors an' miners, love an' hate, fifteen gun-fights an' a murder wove into it; an' he declares that, while everybody can't play the big parts, there's room in the gamblin' an' barroom scenes for every one.

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He calls these last the onsomble. All hands gets a chance.

Further, he allows that his wife has done acted in this same show once before an' that she learns everybody how to play his part. Name of the piece is "Jack of Clubs." Rehearsal tomorrow night at seven o'clock. Be on time or pay a fine of five dollars. Henceforth an' from now on, this actin' game is cold business.

Owin' to the fact that I had the bad luck to be drafted as chief stagehand, I'm present at every round-up of Wallpole's herd. An' I'd like to mention that every one of these gatherin's is full up with earnest endeavor an' confusion. Them sessions sure does resemble a meetin' of Congress.

The first time we get together there's mighty near a riot, right after Wallpole finishes dishin' out the parts.

"Hey, you!" "Cut-Throat" Williams yells, shakin' his little book at Wallpole. "Where at do you-all harvest the idea that I'm goin' to be a Mexican in this here show?"

Cut-Throat hails from Arizona.

"Why, you knock-kneed dogie, you're standin' right on the brink of a sheer precipice!" he hollers. "I want you to know that if I owns the only tree in the world, I forbids any greasers to set down in the shade!

"An' listen. Accordin' to this here book, this buckskin gets killed in the second act for tryin' to knife a white man. You take it for Gospel that any time I draw my knife there ain't nobody fast enough to down me before I sheaths her in some gent's innards. This here play is all wrong."

"Is that so?" Scar-Face Ed sneers. "Let me tell you, pardner, you got a heap to learn. This here book of mine states that I'm due to shoot you in the back of the neck for tryin' to jab your stiletto into a white man. An' in my capacity as *Denver Dan*, square gambler, I aim to accomplish that pleasant task. I don't stand by an' allow no greaser to carve his dinner offen a paleface. I'm warnin' you, jes' as sure as you attempts to assassinate this helpless pup what this book styles *Harold MacGregor*, I'm goin' to cut loose an' disjoint your vertebræ with a forty-five.

"An' I make her plenty vivid. I aim to get close enough to sear your neck right smart with powder-burn, thereby forcin' you to yell. You-all hollerin' thataway sure makes our scene strong an' realistic."

"You said it," Cut-Throat agrees. "She'll sure be realistic an' true to life. Any time you-all brands me with any powder-pits I'm sure goin' to turn that rostrum into a shambles. Right then an' there I accumulate enough red meat to do me for a week!"

"Disregardin' all this wah-wah about these phony killin's an' attempts at same, I'd like to ask how you get the notion that I'm goin' to fall in love with that son of yourn?" Dick Peters inquires of Wallpole. "When you-all state that that down-covered goslin' is goin' to be a lovely young lady an' the hero-een of this play, I ain't no way interested. But askin' me to stand right out before my friends an' enemies an' fondle an' embrace that slab-sided he infant changes the odds considerable.

"I'm willin' to bet a few chips on any hand I pick up; but this here mitt convinces me I'm entitled to a five-card draw. I discards, complete."

"I'm feelin' jes' as bad as that, too," declares "Pete-the-Pig." "You-all can take my piece an' confer it on to somebody without no principles," he says, handin' his part to Wallpole. "Me, I don't portray no hollow-headed goat that ain't got no more sense than to set down to eat with his back to the winder, knowin' that no less than two gunmen is scoutin' for his scalp.

"This imbecile that you requests me to enact gets plugged from behind durin' that same meal. An' what does he do? This fool book commands him to set still an' die, without no struggle or move of no kind. He jes' dies.

"I'd like to know why he can't make some kind of try to die like a human bein'. Why can't he maybe give anyway one grunt or make a drag for his gun?

"Another thing, an' final: I decline to assume this puerile rôle unless I get bumped off in the last act. This plan of sendin' me West right away in the first act don't make no hit with me. The way she is now, I don't no more'n get warmed up to actin' when along comes this locoed Mexican, totin' his shotgun, an' sends me over the divide. There never was no greaser possessed of a shotgun.

"Moreover, a charge of buckshot jes' nacher'lly blows me away from that banquet aforesaid, an' smears me all over six counties. I don't like it. The very best I can say for this here play is that she's too stren'ous. She ain't refined."

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"I got a idea," Missouri Bill announces, that settles all these disputes an' difficulties an' satisfies everybody. Let's have new deal all round. Let's discard this ere gory an' turbulent offerin' an' stage omethin' more pleasin' an' natural.

"I move that we perduces 'Ten Nights in Barroom.' That way, we do all our rearsin' over to the Pioneer, strugglin' oward perfection in our natural surroundn's an' inspired by the proper an' fittin' tmosphere. An' I choose to be *Slade*, the naverick what keeps the road-house an' ends his own bar."

"Second the motion," Dick Peters says. 'An' I move an' second that we make it One Month' instead of 'Ten Nights.' Let's ake plenty time. That way, by rehearsin' very night for a whole moon, we get letter erfect. Also, I claim the part of *Frank Slade*, which is the son of Missouri. I seen his here play once, an' old man *Slade's* boy nakes a big hit with me."

"Jes' what reasons inspires you with a ongin' to pose as my offspring?" Missouri ueries, plenty polite an' frigid.

"I got two good excuses for desirin' to ppear in public as your progeny," Dick xplains. "As I remember this here 'Ten Nights,' old man *Slade* owns a roadhouse n' acts as his own hooch-clerk. He disenses frumenti to the entire village an' orrupts the whole male populace till they ain't fit for nothin'. He seduces an' degrades the men-kind of that burg until they ain't no more use than a bathtub at the ottom of the ocean. He even allows his wn son to cultivate a longin' for strong liquor, urgin' that striplin' to imbibe of oug-juice until the poor weaklin' becomes a reg'lar peon thereto. An' as I recollect this here son once he's firmly in the toils of the red pizen he ain't got nothin' to do durin' the whole show but jes' set round in his paw's deadfall an' swizzle red-eye. He don't have to say nothin' nor do nothin' till the very last act.

"By this time *Slade* an' his boy has drunk up the entire stock except one bottle. Realizin' that the bank's busted, *Frank* assassinates his sire with the lone bottle of corn-oil, thereby gettin' even all around an' winnin' the last of the strong water for hisself.

"An' I sure feel that I can play that patricide *Frank* with vim an' understandin'. Here's why:

"Maybe I don't need to remind you that I loan you-all my lead dog last Winter an' that you take that canine out on a prospectin'-trip. An' maybe you recollect tyin' that malamute to a tree, day after day, while you're away from camp burnin' down a hole on a creek where there ain't no pay-dirt.

"An' further perhaps you can call to mind that while you're away off from camp, pursuin' your foolish an' futile hunt for a pay-streak, the wolves comes along an' devours that star leader of mine. Your bright scheme of tyin' the poor devil so's he can't get away makes it soft an' easy for them wolves. The table's all set for dinner when they shows up. Therefore it gives me a whole lot of satisfaction an' pleasure to bust your conk, even if I spoil a bottle of good booze a-doin' it."

"Say!" Wallpole yells. "Whatever do you loquacious freaks think you're here for? What's the meanin' of all this personal wah-wah an' unanimous kickin' an' complainin' about the rôles I done dished out? I want you sap-heads to understand that I put in the best part of a week, conferrin' careful with my wife concernin' this play an' these here characters, an' who's to play 'em. An' you can gamble we assign you to your proper stations. That wife of mine is a finished actress, an' she sure knows what she's doin' in handlin' this affair.

"Me an' her argues about you wahoos an' this 'Jack of Clubs' show by the hour; an' we come to the conclusion that said play is a game wherein mighty near anybody can take a hand. Barrin' the rôles that me an' my frow an' son is to enact, there ain't airy single part in the whole 'script that calls for hardly no intelligence. Not a single one of them parts overtaxes you galoots, mental. All you got to do is act natural, an' the whole production is a howlin' success.

"Another thing: We ain't never goin' to get nowhere by practisin' thisaway. We got to learn these here lines an' then come here nights an' say 'em. All shows is prepared that way.

"Now maybe I ain't no theatrical sharp. Maybe I don't know hardly nothin' about this show game. Say that's it. Figgerin' that way, I makes a suggestion.

"I move an' second that Mrs. J. Wallpole Frost, my talented spouse, be elected to manage an' direct this here aggregation of dough-heads durin' the time said dodos is

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banded together as play-actors. An' I further move-that what she says, goes."

Well, what they goin' to do? They're plumb helpless an' hog-tied. Wallpole has jes' nacher'lly got 'em up a tree. He kills off the dissatisfaction an' wranglin' at one swipe. For it's sure an' certain, they can't vote ag'in' a woman.

Soon as Wallpole's lady is voted in as big chief, she makes a talk an' publishes the new orders of the day.

"You gentlemen," she informs 'em, "are now goin' to quit all this fussin' an' complainin', immediate. We've done got together to present this here play in Manook an' do it in a way that does credit to the town an' to us. We're goin' to do it. But we can't accomplish nothin' unless you all work an' try. So, as a aid an' stimulus to our efforts, I'm goin' to establish a few rules. Listen good:

"No talkin' at rehearsals except your lines.

"No more kickin' to nobody, no time, about your parts.

"Full obedience to the director, which is me.

"Bein' late for rehearsal means a fine.

"Breakin' any one of these rules costs you five dollars, each time.

"Now, seein' that we understand each other an' because everything is so nice an' pleasant once more, I'm tellin' you that I'm goin' to coach an' help all hands all I can, so's to make this production a credit an' pleasure to everybody. School's out for tonight. Rehearsal seven-thirty tomorrow evenin'. Good night."

"I'll say that from now on, I'm dead certain that we put over a winner," Scar-Face Ed remarks, soon as they get outside. "If that Mrs. Wallpole puts half the snap an' ginger in handlin' Wallpole that she jes' displays in layin' down the law to us, he becomes a model for all husbands to imitate in less'n a month. Or else he vanishes. She's sure a brief an' concise female."

IT'S maybe three or four days later before the town hears anything more concernin' the Cooperative Thespians. Then one night old Doc Hatch busts into the Pioneer an' lets loose an alarmin' tale. It's like this: Old Doc has been out on his claim for more'n three months steady, an' he don't know hardly nothin' concernin' Wallpole an' his flock of lambs. The old codger maybe hears we done added a op'ry-house to the civic improvements of Manook an' that a play is bein' prepared for torture therein, but that about let's the old man out.

So that night when he staggers into the saloon an' orders a drink without invitin' nobody we know the old pelican is plenty shook up about something an' all unstrung.

Soon as he stows away a couple of stiff snorts somebody asks him what ails him.

"Nothin's wrong with me," the old pirate answers. "I'm jes' nacher'lly all shot to —— concernin' the mental state of a friend of mine; that's all. I jes' come in from Little Manook, an' as I pass Scar-Face Ed's cabin I hear some things that calls for quick an' drastic action on the part of this camp."

"What's Scar-Face been doin'?" Hank Sommers inquires.

"Nothin'—yet," old Doc admits. "But he aims to accomplish plenty an' a little more. What that poor, deranged misfortunate proposes to do to a selected few of our leadin' citizens is plumb ruinous. I don't, no time, favor interferin' in nobody's private affairs; but if Scar-Face carries out the threats I done heard him make, he jes' nacher'lly spoils a couple of *hombre* that sure don't deserve such brutal an' barbarous treatment."

"This here is a shock an' a surprize to me," says Hank. "Heretofore I always holds up Scar-Face as a model galoot; peaceful in peace an' plenty warlike an' hostile when trouble stalks through the land. An' I ain't heard of no serious differences that Scar-Face stages with anybody since the time him an' 'Hard-Luck' Myers has the argument about which one wears the smallest moccasins.

"Maybe he's jes' drunk. For a while anyway better let him be," Hank advises.

So that's what we done. We ain't got no idea what agitates Scar-Face, the way old Doc charges, so we say nothin' an' let her go as she looks. But not for long.

Next mornin' Doc puts in a couple of hours callin' on about a dozen or so of our pack-leaders. He visits all of us leadin' spirits an' urges us to come to his cabin at eight that night. We're there on time.

"Now then," says Hank Sommers to our host soon as the old man's hooch-flagon has been around twice, "state your reasons for assemblin' this gatherin' of shinin' lights, an' tell it all."

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"First off," Doc begins, "I want to say iat I get you wolves together for the sole urpose of protectin' the public. Also, I gger we lend a helpin' hand to one of our umber who's sufferin' mental, an' who has one plumb loco. It's too bad, an' I sure el sorry for Scar-Face; but we jes' nach-r'lly ought to tie him up till the river opens n' we get a chance to send him Outside to bughouse. It's thisaway:

"Last night I come in from the diggin's. 'm hurryin' through town, headed for the ioneer. Jes' as I pass Scar-Face's cabin hear a yell that mighty near yanks me out f my moccasins. Right on top of that omes a groan that tells of enough sufferin' n' misery to stock up a three-time widder-voman with grief for a dozen years.

"But that ain't all. Next thing that I iear is Scar-Face ravin'. An' he certainly loes promise a whole lot of inconvenience o some folks that I know.

"'Hah!' he hollers. 'Hah-Hah! Hah! At last! For many years I have waited, in' at last the day approaches! Mexican Pete, you'll pay for your perfidy with your ife's blood! I'll cut your heart out!

"'An' as for you, Harold McGregor, I saved your life only that I might slay you it my pleasure! Sirrah, I'm goin' to blow your soul to eternity an' throw your worthless carcass into the Platte!'

"Believe me, gents, this talk mighty near curdles me. Cuttin' the heart out of a greaser, which he's a stranger to me anyway, ain't maybe so awful bad, though it's plumb medieval, at that; but blowin' a white man full of holes an' then castin' his remains into the Platte is nothin' less than crime!

"More'n that, any time Scar-Face tries to heave that Harold into the Platte River he makes a play that shows he's demented. That silvery stream is easy two thousand miles from here in a air-line.

"When Scar-Face makes that loony crack, I hurry away. An' I tell some of you-all how he's makin' bad medicine, soon as I reach the Pioneer. You-all allow it's nothin' but hooch a-sizzlin', an' I let it go at that.

"But when I return to my shack I hear a lot more of the same murderous remarks, this time coupled with the names of Missouri Bill an' Cutthroat Williams, I figger it's time to call a halt. He's gettin' personal."

"Why, you poor, miserable, old hamstrung walrus, is that all the excuse you got for callin' us together?" Hank explodes. "Ain't you never goin' to keep up with the times an' inform yourself of some news once in a while?

"Lemme notify you that Scar-Face Ed ain't no more crazy than what you are. Maybe not more'n half. He's one of the leadin' figures in Manook's constellation of dramatic stars, an' he's merely practisin' his piece for a bang-up show which is goin' to be perpetrated in the near future. You-all done took up our valuable time for nothin' an' unduly alarmed us without no reason. Therefore we now adjourn to the Pioneer, where you'll settle for the conversation-water for the rest of the evenin'."

"All right," Doc agrees. "But I'm sure goin' to remove myself away from this town, permanent," he threatens. "Every time I blow into camp you-all loons is engaged in pullin' off one more crack-brained stunt. I'm gettin' nervous.

"More'n that, if Scar-Face Ed is attemptin' to be a actor, I'm still claimin' he's crazy. An' you wahoos is goin' to agree with me right after this projected show comes off."

ABOUT two weeks after old Doc's fluke meetin', things comes to a focus. As a preliminary Dutch Bill sashays around town an' sticks up a lot of signs. These warnin's is hand-lettered by Bill, on some of Jack's wrappin'-paper, an' they announce that the "Jack of Clubs" is due to appear at the Op'ry-House day after tomorrow. Tickets, two dollars.

Injuns allowed in the back of the house. Everybody come early an' hog all the front seats before somebody else gets 'em.

"What I'd like to know," Tommy Andrews queries of Dutch Bill, "is what makes you-all squander your time an' energy, goin' around pastin' up these announcements thisaway. The way I figger they're useless, unnecessary an' superfluous. Everybody knows that show comes off tomorrow night. What's the idea?"

"I got a lot of money to bet that you're easy the most empty-headed an' vacuous coot I ever see," Bill responds. "If I don't know positive that this town is less'n four years old, I'd jes' nacher'lly conclude that you was born right here. An' I'm inclined

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to believe that you ain't no more mature than this village, at that.

"Don't you know that every play blazons its appearance by jes' such artistic placards as these here? Where you-all been at, all the time?"

"I don't know," Tommy admits. "I must have been floatin' around 'way out in space somewheres for a long while. Things ain't right with me—I can feel that. Every time I look at that nightmare which you jes' sticks up, I feel like I'm livin' on another world. Maybe it's Mars I'm visitin', for I sure want to fight. Or maybe it's that poster of yourn that imbues me with this hostile desire. More'n likely, that's what's wrong," he concludes, shakin' his head.

"You're jealous because you ain't actin' in the show," Bill allows. "Now that you know this play is surely comin' off, you an' a lot more scoffin' sore-heads is peeved because you ain't in it. When you mavericks see this marvelous production you're goin' to be plenty surprized."

"I figger to be," Tommy admits. "An' I'm prepared accordin'. I already got me a quart of hooch an' a big bottle of ammonia which I aim to have with me at that 'Jack of Clubs' mêlée. No doubt at all that I'm goin' to be surprized mighty near fatal durin' them agonies; but I got a hunch that by drinkin' a lot of hooch an' sniffin' the ammonia right frequent I can maybe last out the whole three acts. If I feel that these remedies ain't potent enough to counteract the miseries induced by the antics of them clowns, I'm goin' to reverse my play an' drink the ammonia. No matter how I suffer, I'm goin' to see the whole of that show."

Before we realize it day after tomorrow night arrives. Everybody in camp, Injuns an' all, has done struggled into a clean shirt, slicked up their hair, pinned back their ears an' unloosed their best smile. We're determined to inaugurate the drama in Manook with pomp an' ceremony. The show is set to begin at eight o'clock; but by seven-thirty every last man in camp, white an' red, is on hand an' seated. She's a mite crowded; but by forcin' a bunch of redskins to squat on benches that we string along the walls, everybody finally gets settled and satisfied.

For the first quarter-hour everything is all right an' lovely. All hands passes the time by admirin' our op'ry-house an' makin' remarks about same.

"What's them things onto that curtain?" "Red-an'-Black" Thompson inquires of Hard-Luck Myers.

"Them's cows," Hard-Luck declares. "That there paintin' is a scene in Holland."

"Go on!" Red-an'-Black jeers. "Them's mountains with snow patches on to 'em. Who ever seen blue cows with white spots?"

"You give me a big pain," Hard-Luck complains. "You poor lunkhead, don't you know there ain't no mountains in Holland? That miserable unfinished land is plumb flat an' soggy, same like the flapjacks you-all makes."

"If I ain't got this lighted lamp in my hand, I sure knocks them empty heads offen you two," Dutch Bill informs 'em. "Jes' wait here till I set this glim in her bracket an' I'll come back an' pull you two jackasses apart, a arm an' a leg at a time. I want you lunatics to know that I painted that curtain an' that there masterpiece is a chariot race in Rome. Them's horses, dern ye!"

"What we waitin' for?" Rory Mack demands. "We're all here. Start her up."

"She's a good idea," Hank Sommers agrees. "But let's do her right. This here is a mighty important night in Manook's history. Let's help her along by playin' accordin' to the rules. The proper an' high-toned way to inform them actors that we're all here an' plumb impatient is by applaudin'. Let's all hands start stompin'."

"Not me," Doc Hatch objects. "I ain't goin' to applaud nothin'. How do we know but what this here show turns out plenty *cultus?* More'n likely she ain't no good for nothin'."

"Why, you dern, snarlin' old polecat, what do you mean by heavin' mud at this entertainment before she ever gets started?" Hank Sommers yells. "You're always kickin'. You're nothin' more'n a nacheral-born wet blanket. I got a good mind to call a meetin' on you right here, for makin' remarks detrimental to the advancement an' progress of this camp. But I ain't goin' to pay you no more, mind. You ain't no more'n half alive nohow, an' I treats you same as if you don't never exist. All hands in favor of stompin' our approval of the festivities about to be liberated, say 'Aye' an' do so!" Hank hollers.

They done both. Them impatient patrons

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art hollers an' whistles an' stomps some-
in' fearful. An' they keep at it. The
ily thing that prevents 'em from kickin'
e floor to splinters is because most of
m is wearin' moccasins. The din gets so
afenin' that Wallpole steps out in front
the curtain.

"Hey!" he yells, wavin' his arms for
lence. "What are you-all lunkheads
yin' to do? Stop it! Quit! Cease this
re eruption or there ain't goin' to be no
ow. Dern your fool hides, what do you-
l mean? You got my actors so plumb
ttled by this uproarious demonstration
at the whole bunch is ready to stampede.
lissouri Bill has done vamoosed already;
n' he vows that when he returns he'll be
tin' his Winchester. He declares he's
oin' to take no chances. He aims to act
is part supported by a forty-five-seventy
n' a handful of soft-lead shells."

"We don't mean nothin'," Hank assures
Vallpole. "This here furore is jes' a
ttle token of our approval of you-all."

"I'm jes' nacher'lly overcome with grati-
ude an' emotion at hearin' such," Wallpole
llows. "In fact, I'm full up an' over-
owin'. You loons is entirely too polite
n' affectionate. Set still from now on an'
sten to the music. The orchestra's about
o shoot."

Which they done. Milt Cohen with his
ddle an' Dick Blake an' his guitar enter-
ains us for the next half-hour in a way that
aves no doubt whatever that Manook
oasts two real musicians. That sawed-off
Iebrew reels off piece after piece of sure-
nough music, startin' in with grand op'ry
n' concludin' with the "Irish Washer-
voman"; an' everything he tackles sounds
etter than what he's jes' finished. An' the
vay Dick Blake walks his hand up an' down
he neck of that guitar, ripplin' out chords
n' runs an' trills as a aid an' support to
Milt's solos, is nothin' short of marvelous.

Them boys can play. Everybody in
hat wickiup, includin' us folks on the
tage, jes' sets down an' listens, or maybe
loats away on the wings of emotion while
hat melody is floodin' the buildin'. That
udience certainly gets back the price of
their tickets before the show ever starts.

The last thing that them artists offers is
a simple little song that, I learn since, ain't
never played in no show. There ain't a
sound in that whole buildin' when they
finish; not even so much as a sigh disturbs
that memory-laden quiet. Maybe it was
because that sweet, plain little ballad meant
jes' a bit more to us than to most folks.
More'n likely you've heard it. It was
"Home, Sweet Home."

SOMEBODY has done said that something funny is sure to happen at every funeral. Anyway while we're all held to silence by the spell of that hauntin' music, Wallpole pulls a play that breaks the tension an' opens the ball.

"Ladies an' gents," he says as he steps out in front of the curtain, "we're all ready to cut loose. I'm out here to announce that we're goin' to offer tonight a feast of stirrin' episodes depictin' life an' death in the boom days of one of Colorado's famous camps. You-all are about to witness some bang-up an' unusual actin', an' I'm confident you go home declarin' that you never witness anything equal to this affair, nowhere, no time."

With that he backs off. An' in less'n a minute we realize that Wallpole has handed it to us straight. He ain't hardly out of sight when the curtain rolls up, slow. Out comes Cutthroat Williams with his face stained a bright yaller. He's the exact shade of a punkin. He's wearin' a red handkerchief instead of a hat, an' he sports a long, black mustache.

"I told you!" Doc Hatch explodes. "Look at him! There never was no Mexican born with such a hue like that! That there miscreant looks jes' exactly like a orange to me."

Cutthroat sneaks out to the center of the stage, glares at Doc, gulps down somethin' a couple of times an' retires.

Nobody so much as moves. She's sure mysterious.

A whole lot of talkin' an' urgin' back of the scenery. Cutthroat steps out again.

"Hah!" he declares, advancin' down to the footlights.

Then he stands there, shakin' like a nigger shootin' craps, the sweat standin' out on his forehead in big blobs.

"She certainly is a warm night," Rory Mack sympathizes with Cutthroat. "I doubt if she's more'n twenty below, outside."

Cutthroat acts like this information from Rory is jes' nacher'lly more'n he can bear. He rolls his eyes, swallers somethin' big an' hard a couple of times an' walks off.

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"He done pretty good, at that," Hank Sommers allows. "That boy's sick. Judgin' from his color, I'd say he's took bad with yaller ja'ndice. I don't see how he manages to make any statement at all."

"Well," says Scar-Face Ed, suddenly appearin' in the middle of the stage from nowhere, "I'm here at last."

An' he sure is there. He's dressed up fitten for a weddin'. He certainly looks noble. He's got on white cotton pants an' a long black coat that half hides a red checkered vest. He sports shiny high boots an' a new Stetson. He jes' nacher'lly radiates class an' refinement.

"I'm here at last," he repeats. "An' this town looks good to me. I'm present in this burg to show a lot of these opulent miners how Denver Dan, square gambler, can pry 'em loose from their wealth an' make 'em like it."

"Now that's somewheres near the real thing," Rory Mack cuts in from the audience. "You surely are the breathin' image of a real sport," he assures Scar-Face. "I certainly hope you clean up on them miner gents you got designs on."

"Say!" Wallpole hollers, rushin' out on the stage. "What in tarnation is the matter with you Piutes anyhow? How do you suppose we're ever goin' to finish this show if you-all keep on cuttin' in like this? You sap-heads cease from carryin' on conversations with the actors thisaway."

Wallpole turns to retire an' bumps into Cutthroat, who's jes' saunterin' into view.

"Beat it, you pop-eyed chromo!" Wallpole hisses. "What you doin' out here?"

Cutthroat stares at Wallpole, gulps down that same lump he done swallered durin' his last appearance an' sneaks away.

"I'll bet a whole stack of yaller chips that greaser is mean," Blue-Nose McDonald remarks. "I'll gamble he's right now cookin' up some dirty work. It's a cinch he's plottin' to slice up some unsuspectin' gent. The way that *Mexicano* maintains what them novelists calls a 'deadly, omnious silence' sure gives me the creeps."

"I'll buy him a drink if he carves that whole locoed crew," Doc Hatch promises. "An' I'll present a full bottle to anybody that'll inform me jes' what this here nightmare aims to elucidate."

"Maybe we hear some news now," Hank whispers as Mrs. Wallpole appears.

She's done harnessed herself into a short ridin'-skirt, with little brown boots an' a sombrero. She's got her hair hangin' down over her shoulder, an' I'll say she's a picture. Likewise, she's as cool as a mile of ice.

An' the way she grabs hold of that "Jack of Clubs" edifice an' pushes same back into the semblance of a solid structure is nothin' short of marvelous. She's done sensed that the whole show is crumblin' to a disastrous fall before it gets started; so she steps forward like the good, well-trained soldier she is an' takes command.

Maybe she appropriates a lot of remarks that belongs to them other mummers; perhaps she's kind of disjointed an' ramblin' at times; but in about three minutes that audience has got a full an' comprehensive view of what that play ought to look like. She makes sure. She outlines what ought to happen, clear down to the fall of the last curtain.

She ain't tryin' to steal nothin' offen her brother artists; she jes' don't trust 'em. An' she's determined that their antics, from now on, is goin' to mean somethin' an' make sense. That's plain.

Appears Dick Peters, otherwise Harold McGregor, draggin' Wallpole's son Monty, alias Clarice LaJoy, into view. Clarice has inserted hisself into a white dress an' a lot of yaller curls, an' he's all painted up like a new house. Dick has got him a arm-lock on this entrancin' creature an' he pulls her along like he's goin' to a stampede.

They stop in the center of the stage an' go to dialoguin'. That is, Clarice does. Dick jes' swallers hard an' mumbles somethin' once in a while.

But the kid's a wonder. He talks an' giggles an' rolls his eyes an' flirts with that poor, sufferin' longhorn Dick till he dern near makes us believe he's a sure-enough blushin' damsel.

"Of course I love you, dear. Ain't you goin' to kiss me?" he pleads, turnin' up his homely mush to his wild-eyed lover.

Dick's in a trance. He stands there bug-eyed, an' stares at Clarice like he never seen her before in his life.

"Kiss him, you tongue-tied goat!" somebody off-stage whispers.

"Aw, ——," Dick mutters as he stoops an' salutes the blushin' Clarice.

Comes Mexican Pete. He sneaks out jes' as Dick bends over his adorin' Monty-Clarice; an' before anybody realizes what in tarnation he's up to, he levels the shotgun

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s carryin' an' blazes away at the unsus-
tin' Harold McGregor. He's less'n ten
: away, an' he can't miss. He jes'
her'lly plugs that reluctant Romeo with
lank charge an' a big wad of newspaper,
ar● in the seat of the pants!
ın' if you think he don't score a bull's-
you're away off. Dick lets out a blood-
dlin' yell an' soaks Clarice a beautiful
lop on the jaw. As she falls he leaps
ır the fair form of his lady love an' dis-
ɔears, yellin' at every jump. Clarice
ys down while Cutthroat stares at her,
rified.
[es' as Wallpole, his wife, Scar-Face an'
the rest of 'em rush on to the stage, Cut-
oat shakes hisself an' grins. It's plenty
in he's thought of somethin'. Once
re he aims his shotgun. But this time,
tead of pickin' out a victim, he points
: at the top scenery, what Wallpole calls
ɔ sky borders, an' lets go.
The roar ain't half died away before
allpole an' Scar-Face grabs him.
"Soak him," Wallpole begs as he pins
ıtthroat's arms.
"Watch me," Scar-Face answers, smear-
Cutthroat's right eye with a dude of a
nch.
Right there Mrs. Wallpole screws up her
:e an' contributes a ear-splittin' screech.
"Stop him!" she pleads.
"All bets is off!" Cutthroat roars, pastin'
allpole with a pippin to the nose. "Here's
ıere I clean up. Nobody's barred!" he
ıoops.
In less'n three seconds half the audience
on the stage an' advancin' into action in
ass formation. Believe me, she was some
'ah-ray. Actors, audience, stage-hands
' even a few Injuns mixes up in one seeth-
', churnin', howlin' mob. Everybody is
ı his own protection; an' kickin', bitin',
ugin' an' all other styles of mayhem is the
g'lar order of the day. She's a beauty of
scrap.
But, like everything entertainin' an' ex-
tin', she don't last long. Mrs. Wallpole
ast into the festivities with another one
her buzz-saw shrieks, an' the carnage
ɔmes to a abrupt end.
As is right an' proper at this juncture,
lanook's impresario antes first. Wrig-
lin' out from under five or six stren'ous an'
arnest citizens, Wallpole advances on
utthroat with all three degrees of murder
ashin' from his eyes.

"Now, mister, talk!" he orders.
"Thanks, I aim to," Cutthroat says as he breaks loose from Hank Sommers. "An' the very first thing I wish to announce is that I'm goin' to terminate your career as a promoter. I figger to bring your activities as a theatrical magnate to a dead stop. I'm strong for culture an' refinement all the time, an' opposed to any boisterous an' rude actions in anybody; but I here an' now warns you to provide yourself with a big sack so's you can gather yourself up after I get through manglin' you.
"Mister Man, I'm now goin' to start takin' you apart, a little bit at a time! Nobody can't train me to do somethin' an' then attempt to annihilate me for carryin' out instructions!"
"Listen!" Dick Peters hisses at Cutthroat. "You-all go ahead an' disjoint this imbecile Wallpole in any way that appeals to your murderous instincts. It'll be all right an' hunk with me. He's got it comin'. But I'm tellin' you:
"Right away after your justifiable bloodlust is sated, I'm goin' to buy into the game. It's my firm purpose to spread you-all out on the floor to that extent that you'll serve as a carpet for this whole stage. I'm jes' nacher'lly goin' to beat you to death. You've sure lived long enough.
"At that, I'm in no hurry. I gives you a reasonable time to tell us a few things. Maybe you'd like to explain jes' what tempts you to bust up this show, right in the very first act, by hornin' into my love scene an' plasterin' me in the pants with that shotgun.
"You ain't due to even appear until 'way along into the second act. But what do you do? The curtain ain't no more'n up till you walk out an' start to wanderin' around the stage with your eyes bulgin' out an' the sweat rollin' offen you in streams. You sure act like you jes' nacher'lly expect to pass out. What you-all sufferin' from, anyhow?"
"I ain't one bit sick," Cutthroat denies. "Not me. All that ails me, I'm jes' confused a mite. Here's me, dressed up like a bandit an' personatin' a Mexican. I nacher'lly abhors them buckskins since the day I'm born an' maybe before that.
"Moreover, I've got to be a mean, or'nary, low-down *cholo*. I'm actin' to be *mucho malo*, all the time. An' I got to kill a man in this fool show. Nacher'lly I don't

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like none of these crazy goin's-on, an' I'm worried. So I jes' figger it out:

"Maybe it's jes' as well if I wade right in at the beginning of the show, croak my victim before he figgers he's due to shuffle off, an' get the whole sad business offen my mind an' this fool paint washed offen my face. This here pigment complexion ain't none comfortable.

"Replyin' to your question, why do I pepper you in the pants? I'll say that I'm plumb overcome by a desire to act natural. My orders is to shoot into the air an' take no chances hurtin' anybody; but I figger that a wad of paper ain't penetratin', so I blaze away, point blank. An' then I empty the other barrel into the top scenery, ther'by carryin' out orders to shoot high, an' at the same time provin' that I recognize an' approve of the technique of the drama.

"I want to add that I'm considerable amazed an' annoyed at the way you played your part. The book says that when I plug you with my scatter-gun, you right away dies. Now what do you do? No sooner do I plug you than you get all excited an' smack your lady-love with a dream wallop. An' then you light out, yellin' like a Comanche. You sure lose all sense of the fitten an' the artistic."

"I'm mighty near overcome with sorrow that I done jarred your esthetic nature thataway," Dick declares. "An' I regret to say that you're due for another shock. Why, you sizzlin' lunatic, what do you shoot me for anyway!" he yells. "It ain't me you're to shoot at, no time! I'm goin' to start in an' bust you——"

All of a sudden Dick stops yellin' an' starts twitchin' his nose an' expandin' his nostrils like a hound on a new scent.

"Don't you go to sniffin' at me!" Cutthroat hollers. "I'll——"

"Fire! Fi-i-ir-e!" Dick yells. "Fire! The whole bloomin' roof's afire!" he shrieks, pointin' at the top scenery.

An' what I mean, Dick ain't spreadin' no false alarm. Every roof-pole over the stage is lined by two thin streaks of ruddy flame, an' the poles themselves is jes' startin' to burn. At a glance it's plain to all hands that when Cutthroat fires into them sky borders thataway he ignites them strips of muslin, an' the fire quick spreads to the dry moss between the roof-poles.

It's Winter. The nearest water is the river—two hundred yards away. An' th river's froze. 'Course, we got a waterhol 'way out from shore, an' it's open—maybe

It don't take no medicine-man to pre dict that Manook's Temple of Tradegy i doomed. Nobody can deny that Cut throat scores a dead-center hit with both barrels. For in less'n two hours the Co operative Op'ry-House is nothin' but a heap of glowin' embers an' soft, white ashes.

NEXT night Wallpole calls a meetin'.

"Gents," he begins soon as we're all assembled, "there ain't no use electin' a chairman to preside at these sad rites. As the chief instigator of the noble movement that fades out in last night's holocaust I'm due to make a report to you-all. So I'll jes' go ahead informal an' unfold this sad tale, after which I figger to adjourn to the Pioneer an' imbibe a whole lot of consolation. I sure need it, an' it's comin' to me.

"The entire total receipts for last night's abbreviated obsequies was four hundred and sixty dollars—cash. We sold exactly two hundred an' thirty tickets.

"We done had expenses for wardrobe, muslin, nails an' other et ceteries to the tune of sixty shekels, which same I done disbursed today. An even eighteen of us noble spirits was banded together in our desire to entertain you-all. Therefore, as we had agreed to share an' share alike, there's a balance of twenty shiners comin' to each member.

"Before distributin' these hard-earned rewards to my colleagues, I want to announce that my talented an' heart-broken wife, who was our treasurer as well as our manager, has done presented me with a list of names which same is a complete roster of our earnest little company.

"After readin' this paper over careful, I learn that that frow of mine, actin' in her capacity of manager, has, at various times an' for all kinds of reasons, fined each one of you poor misfortunates four times apiece at the rate of five dollars a throw. Now, I go all over this statement repeated an' careful; an' the best I can do is declare that all hands is free from debt an' with nothin' comin'. Everybody's even an' nobody's hurt. The Cooperative Thespians is now disbanded, an' this meetin' is adjourned, final, an' without date.

"Gents, until some fuller an' happier day, good-by, fare-you-well an' *adios*."

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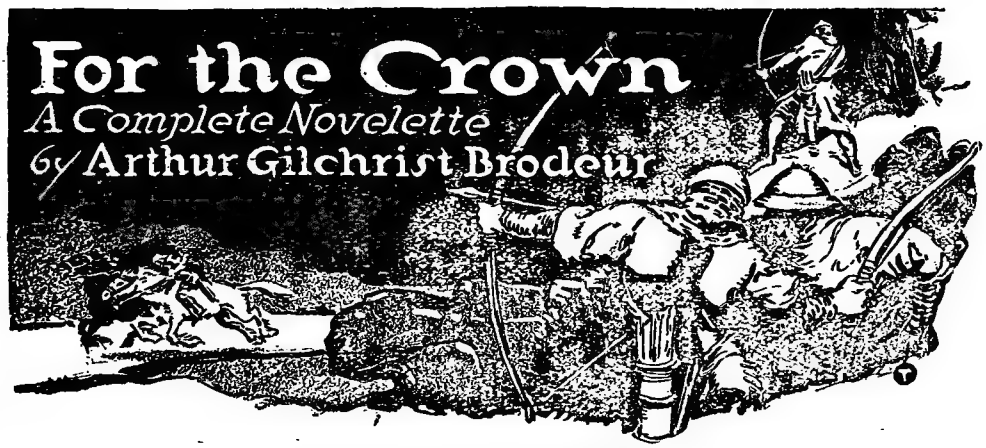

Author of "Faithful," "Red Night,"-etc.

"YONDER ship sails three lengths to our two! If there is not treachery brewing, I have lost my power to read its signs!"

The speaker thrust out one mailed arm from his heavy woolen cloak, and pointed over the starboard rail. His companion followed his pointing finger for a moment, laughed, and turned away.

"You have a seaman's eyes, Pierre Faidit, and a soldier's ears—and both alike mistrustful. Last night, as we rode to the harbor, you heard hoofs in the dark behind us. I heard no hoofs, and I am not hard of hearing. But what have we to do with other horses or other sails than our own?"

Pierre Faidit turned somber eyes upon his friend.

"How many ships, Thomas Becket, sail from Normandy to England these days?"

"Why, few that are honest, that is true," Becket conceded; and his voice was now a little uneasy. "Eustace and his freebooters have swept Duke Henry's merchantmen from the seas. But you do not think——"

"This is the year of our Lord 1151, and mid-Winter at that," the soldier interrupted. "Norman shipmen are bold to face the Winter sea, but not the Winter sea and Count Eustace's rovers together. I think that no ship drives from Normandy to England these days without a mighty errand—and the mightiest errand I know is that on which we sail.

"Mark well: If we land at Winchelsea to-morrow night, yonder swift-winged craft will make port a good five hours before us. Hoofs behind us in the dark; sails behind that leap ahead; and our business is one that craves secrecy. So much hangs on our success that we but do our duty in suspecting, with or without proof, the least trifle that can not be innocently explained!"

Both men were silent for a space; but gloom gathered deeper on the handsome features of Pierre, and he resumed thoughtfully—

"Your man Loriot has a bad eye; I will wager he was born to be hanged."

"What? Arnolt Loriot! He is true as steel."

Becket's voice quivered with indignation.

"Yet you never saw him till he came to Caen a fortnight past?"

"He bore the archbishop's letters to me—enough in itself to prove him honest. The holy Theobald employs no man whom he has not watched, whose heart he has not searched, long and carefully. Did not the archbishop's message bid me have full confidence in Loriot? And now the man lies sick in Caen, worthy of pity rather than mistrust."

Pierre shook his head.

"Remember, Thomas, that the parchments you bear, if they fall into wrong hands may cost us our lives and Duke Henry his crown. Nor will I take any man's opinion of another against my own skill in reading faces, on which my life has more than once depended."

"Nay, Pierre! I have been too secret for any spy to learn our plans, or what we carry. Only the duke, Archbishop Theobald, ourselves, and Loriot know our

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errand; and I will vouch for Loriot. By tomorrow night you will have so much to think of that you will forget your fears."

"BECKET?"

"Aye, your Grace, and a soldier called Pierre Faidit."

The old archbishop leaned back in his great armchair, his wrinkled face lighting up with pleasure.

"Pierre Faidit? That must be he whom men call Pierre de l'Espée—Pierre of the Sword. A good man, whom honest men praise for his stanch loyalty, and whom even the evil admire for his shrewd brain and wondrous swordsmanship. Aye, I remember—Thomas Becket told me, a month hence, that he was in Duke Henry's service. —Good! Admit them! And look ye, Canon Matthew, that the door is well closed when they have entered."

Theobald of Canterbury, Primate of England, was a man far gone in age, wrinkled and yellow like old parchment, and with hands that trembled. The firelight, playing on his features, illumined a face at once shrewd and fine—the face of a saint whose holiness was well supported by a strong, masterful soul, and directed by the penetrating insight of a powerful mind.

Never, for all that he stood on the brink of the grave, had the great archbishop been as powerful as now. He and King Stephen each had a hand on the helm of England's fate; and it was hard to say whose grip most nearly directed England's course.

Strong in battalions, weak in character, the usurper Stephen faced a crisis in his unrighteous career. Unable to control his own turbulent barons; forced to retain their loyalty by giving them free license to plunder and torture the poor; haunted by his evil conscience, which constantly reminded him how wrongfully he withheld England's throne from its rightful ruler, Duke Henry of Normandy, his last years embittered by the shameful crimes of his only son, Count Eustace, Stephen still toiled desperately to retain the throne and bequeath it to that son, unworthy as he was.

And with every fresh tiding of new deeds of violence, blood, and shame committed by Eustace's brutal men-at-arms, King Stephen forgave his son anew, saying to himself that if Eustace reaped the whirlwind, it was he, Stephen, who had sown the wind by usurping Duke Henry's crown. In his determination that his son should succeed him, Stephen was prepared to make any sacrifice—even the sacrifice of humbling his pride before the ancient priest, Theobald, Archbishop of Canterbury.

For in Theobald's hands, and his alone, both Church and State had entrusted the right to crown kings, and to sanction the choice of a king's successor. This right had been vested in the Archbishops of Canterbury since England first became Christian; neither baron nor king dared question it. Therefore Stephen now smiled on Theobald, yielded him power and influence, and prayed him repeatedly to make public proclamation that, when Stephen should die, Eustace should bear the crown.

But Theobald, wily and resolute, evaded every entreaty; and in his heart he was determined that Eustace, the wicked, should never profane the royal scepter with his bloody hands. Even now, as the archbishop waited to receive his visitors, this determination cast a stern shadow over the pleasure he felt at their coming.

A tall, thick-set man entered first, his square shoulders and masterful bearing a strong contrast to the humble monk's gown he wore. Swarthy, hawk-featured, with the air of one who is master over himself, he strode across the archbishop's low-ceiled workroom toward the great hearth. But even as he reached the armchair where Theobald sat, he threw himself on his knees, and kissed the hem of Theobald's robe.

"Master!" he cried.

With exceeding joy the archbishop embraced the man who for years had been his devoted servant and secretary, almost his right hand.

"Becket! Thomas Becket!" he greeted fondly. "My son!"

But now the second man knelt for his blessing: a soldier in full mail, huge of limb, darkly handsome of face; a man in whose eyes the power of command was blended with the pure fire of knightly honor. He kissed the prelate's proffered hand; and Theobald blessed him.

"You are Pierre Faidit?" he said. "Ah, I have heard of you, my son. Like the city builded on a hill, like the bright candle in the Savior's parable, your deeds are seen by all men, and give light to the feet of them who would walk the paths of honor. Aye, I know how many years you served

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Alphonse the Great of Toulouse, how noble a name you won by your loyalty to him.

"Now he is dead, and you serve Henry Plantagenet, Duke of Normandy, Anjou, and Brittany—who, please God, will one day be King of England. When that day comes, Pierre, I hope to see the golden spurs of knighthood on your heels, for richly have you deserved such reward."

Before Pierre Faidit could thank the archbishop for his welcome, the latter turned back to Becket.

"What brings you here so soon, Thomas?" he asked.

Becket stared in surprize.

"Your letters, holy father. Did you not send for me through your servant, Arnold Loriot?"

The archbishop's brow clouded.

"Eighteen days ago," he answered slowly, "Arnold Loriot, my servant, was found murdered in a waterside tavern in Winchelsea!"

Becket cried out in consternation.

"Then the messenger who came to me, who called himself Loriot—" he stammered. "The letters he bore, sealed with your own seal——"

"What said those letters, Thomas?" the archbishop questioned sharply.

"One contained the names, written in your own hand, of such nobles as still hesitated to pledge themselves to Duke Henry, though favorable to his cause. First among those names was the Earl of Lincoln. The second letter urged me to come to you swiftly, to report the progress of Duke Henry's preparations."

"Enough! Those were the same letters I entrusted to Loriot, to be brought to you; and they seem not to have been changed. But they have been opened, read, and re-sealed, doubtless by him who bore them to you; for the very day Loriot left me, my private seal was stolen. He who passed himself off for Loriot before you was——"

"A spy in Stephen's service!" Thomas cried. "Ah, Pierre, you were right! The hoofs behind us in the dark—the ship that made Winchelsea before us——"

"Then the false Loriot came not with you?" Theobald questioned.

"Nay, father; he gave himself out for sick, and tarried behind in the duke's castle at Caen. But when we were gone——"

"When we were gone," Pierre took up the word, "he crept from the castle, trailed us to the port, and took a swift ship to England! Now he has doubtless reported our arrival to Stephen, who will find a place for us in his deepest dungeons!"

Theobald sighed wearily.

"Let me examine the papers you have from the duke," he said.

Thomas handed him two parchments, which the archbishop read and returned.

"For thirteen long years," he uttered slowly, "I have watched and planned and prayed for the unworthy Stephen's overthrow. For two years, Thomas, you have gone back and forth between me and Duke Henry, or fared up and down in Henry's cause, winning over the nobles, spending my gold and his to raise a party in his favor. When I sent Loriot to you, I hoped the time had come when Henry might land in England and claim his crown. These documents you have shown me prove that I was right. But now a spy of Stephen's has put all our efforts in jeopardy; for we dare not hope that the pretended Loriot carried my messages to you without having first shown them to Stephen. Now the king knows of both our conspiracy and my own connection with Henry's cause; and his spy has surely brought him news of your arrival. Stephen has only to seize both you and me to destroy all our hopes—provided he acts before you can carry out the errand for which I sent for you. There is but one chance; Stephen is not a man who acts quickly or resolutely, and his son Eustace is away in France."

"So the pretended Loriot told me," Thomas rejoined. "It is true, then?"

"Aye, though I can not guess why the king's spy should have told you. It is public knowledge that Eustace is in Boulogne. If you can reach the more important of the men whose names I sent you; if you can win them over to take arms for Henry before Eustace returns or Stephen makes up his sluggish mind, we may yet triumph. But remember: Eustace is swift, bloody, ruthless! If he comes back before you have finished your work——"

"Then," Thomas decided quickly, "Pierre and I will ride north to the Earl of Lincoln at once. Of all who have not yet pledged themselves to Duke Henry, he is the mightiest. I have talked with him before, but he has always hesitated. If we can win him, all the North will join us; and with those who have already come over to us in the

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South, we shall have so strong a party that Henry's mere appearance on English soil will strike the crown from Stephen's head!"

Theobald smiled.

"You speak wisely," he commended. "Ride to Lincoln, as fast as ye may—there is not an hour to be lost. Your monk's robe and Pierre's sword may suffice—with proper caution—to protect you. But first, what answer have you brought me from the Pope?"

From under his robe Thomas brought forth a parchment scroll, with the heavy papal seal. Taking it, the archbishop broke the seal and read. His face alight with new happiness, he struck a silver bell that hung by his chair. Canon Matthew entered. To him Theobald delivered the parchment.

"Make a copy of this at once!" he commanded. "With your own hand! Let no other know what is here written!"

Turning to the two before him, he whispered cautiously:

"King Stephen has striven with all his might to wring my consent to his son Eustace's succession. But, knowing well Eustace's evil heart, I have delayed. Meantime I sent a petition to the Holy Father in Rome, praying his sanction for my real purpose—to proclaim not Eustace, but Duke Henry of Normandy, as successor to Stephen on the throne of England. And here, praise God, in this message you have brought me, his Holiness has given me full authority. Nay, more; he has himself named Henry, King of England! Wait, Thomas, till Matthew has the copy ready; show it to the Earl of Lincoln, and he may then dare to join us!"

"The earl is a timid man," Thomas answered. "But, by the rood, I think the papal sanction will convince him!"

"So think I. The earl greatly fears Count Eustace, whose name for savage cruelty is so terrible. But, Thomas—is it not possible that the murderer of Loriot, who seems to have followed you to England, may be Eustace's man, not the king's? If so, then Eustace will soon return in person. The more need for you to complete your task in haste. You must win the earl at once, and then seek safety in Normandy."

"I will," Thomas smiled. "I have a noble helper in Pierre. When I told the duke how Lincoln hesitated, he answered: 'Take Pierre with you. His shrewd head will find a way to win him.' "

"Good! See to your horses, my sons; Matthew will have the copy ready presently. Avoid the king's men; ride warily and fast, for the fate of England rides with you!"

YOUNG Duke Henry Plantagenet had dealt a master-stroke when he sent out his trusted squire, Pierre Faidit, to aid Becket in gaining the allegiance of the least vicious among the English nobles. Henry counted heavily on the justice of his cause, on his claim to the throne as the lineal descendant of William the Conqueror; he counted yet more heavily on the detestation in which Stephen and his son were held among such of the knights and barons as still held their honor dear; but most heavily of all he relied on the adroitness of his envoys.

Thomas Becket, trained under the wise archbishop, was a student of men's minds and hearts, a statesman; he knew how and what to promise, when to suggest a threat, what strings to touch lightly and what strings to strike with heavy hand. But there was something he lacked, which the equally shrewd Pierre could supply—the appeal that lay in Pierre's reputation as the foremost professional soldier between the Rhine and the Atlantic.

Soldiers themselves, the Anglo-Norman nobles would be more drawn toward Henry by the personality and the military arguments of Pierre than by any other consideration.

Straight for Lincoln the two friends rode but luck was against them. The roads were almost impassable; though it was only mid-February, a protracted thaw set in, so that their horses were again and again almost swallowed up in the mud. Moreover, King Stephen seemed to have waked to more than usual vigilance.

Whenever the roads turned out better than average, the glitter of lance-points warned the travelers that king's troops might be ahead. What with the mud, the swollen streams, and royal spearmen, it was late March before Pierre and Thomas were within a day's ride of Lincoln. Moreover, the early season meant renewed activity on the part of highwaymen, who lurked in the long stretches of forest that then covered a large part of England.

Such brigands in great numbers were created by the bitter times. Peasants

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fleeing from death at the hands of cruel masters; soldiers, discharged unpaid—for Stephen's funds were low—even the poorer knights, whom the great barons regarded as their natural prey—all these turned bandit, and infested the lonelier roads singly or in bands. Such men Thomas feared almost as much as he feared the royal troops; for in his saddle-bags he bore large sums of gold entrusted to him by Duke Henry, to buy such aid as promises could not win.

"Yet true it is," Thomas mused aloud, "that there is more honor nowadays in being a thief than in being a baron. For the thieves are dishonest by necessity, and the barons by pure greed of gain. Many a good heart beats under a thief's homespun, but there are few such under noblemen's hauberks."

Pierre reined in, and eyed his comrade sternly.

"You have said such things as these ever since we set foot in England," he said. "And how many times, as we rode through villages burned and ravaged by greedy barons, or by king's troops, have I seen the tears come into your eyes! Thomas, you are a man of your class—better than most at heart, but with the fine gentleman's way of seeing things.

"Now I am peasant-born; and therefore I understand one thing that you, for all your wisdom, can not see: It is not for Henry's sake alone that you are toiling to gain the crown for him; it is even more for the sake of the oppressed English people. You love the folk, commons as well as gentles, and you long to deliver them from their bitter slavery. Why, then, do you look for adherents only among the nobles? Why not turn to the very people you wish to deliver, and persuade them to rise in Duke Henry's name?"

Thomas laughed.

"There speaks the Frenchman. Why, look you, the people are so crushed, so hopeless, so disunited, that no appeal would raise their courage to the point of revolt. The only men among all the common people who would dare strike a blow against Stephen are the outlaws and highwaymen."

"Why not enlist them?" Pierre retorted.

Thomas stared at him, speechless. At last he smote one hand so hard against his thigh that his horse plunged in fright.

"By the mass, Pierre, it is a noble thought! Now I, being born a London merchant's son, naturally look up instead of down; and it never crossed my mind to ask help of the poor and outcast. Why, 'tis among them that our gold would go farthest!"

"Let me carry the gold, then," Pierre advised. "I am both better armed to defend it, and better versed in the ways of common folk, so that I can spend it to better effect. Mayhap your English thieves will even join us for love of one who comes to them with peasant's talk on his lips."

As they spoke, they rode into a little town, where they learned that Earl Robert of Lincoln was even then in his castle of Dalborough, twenty miles this side of Lincoln city. The priest whose hospitality they shared added a friendly caution:

"Ride warily, sirs, through Dalby forest. To the west of the highway all is earl's land, where bandits dare not prowl; but to the east, from Dale Downs to the river, the wood is haunted by Sir Richard Paketon and his outlaws."

"I mind me of that Paketon!" Thomas exclaimed. "Is he not kinsman to the earl?"

"Aye; twenty years since, Sir Richard married the earl's sister. He dwelt in the south then, and was honored for his manly service in the Scottish wars. But five years ago his home was burned by the wild riders of Count Eustace, who shamefully slew his wife and son, and left Sir Richard for dead before his own door. But the knight recovered and came north, where he gathered round him some four hundred broken men, stout archers all. Men say that he and the earl have a secret bargain not to molest each other, so long as neither crosses the other's boundary. Be that as it may, Sir Richard has sworn to take vengeance on Count Eustace; and —— help the king's son if he ever strays in the forest hereabouts!"

Pierre's eyes met Becket's.

"Where is this outlaw's camp?" he asked.

The parish priest crossed himself.

"I know not. But if you wander the quarter of a mile in the forest northeast of the Dale Downs you will find him—or he will find you. But take care, for a mailed soldier is rare prey for Paketon's men."

Early in the morning Thomas and Pierre left the village behind; and two hours later they breasted the rise of Dale Downs, whose low, swelling hills ran far out into the forest

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on both sides of the highway. Here Pierre halted.

"Our ways sunder here, Thomas," he said. "This Paketon is our man. Do you ride on to the earl—yonder is Dalby town, and the fortalice beyond must needs be Dalborough Castle. I will ride into the wood and have speech with Paketon's outlaws."

"But the duke's gold!" Thomas urged. "It will scarce be safe among——"

"You yourself have said that outlaws are honester than barons," Pierre laughed. "Nay, I will use the gold to buy four hundred stout archers for the duke! And bethink you, Thomas: After you have used all your arguments to win the earl, will it not prove the crowning argument if I ride into the castle, stand before you both, and say: 'Lo, Sir Earl, your kinsman, Richard Paketon, has already joined Duke Henry's banner! With them, and your stout men-at-arms, to protect you, what need have you to fear Count Eustace and his bullies?' "

Thomas laughed.

"A good plea indeed, if you ever leave the forest alive."

"Which I will," Pierre retorted. "I ride for Henry's crown and my own gold spurs!"

And he dashed into the forest.

Thomas looked long and anxiously after him; but at last he urged his own mount down the high road toward Dalborough Castle.

The earl's fortress was worthy of his greatness. A high, round tower of thick masonry within a square stone bailey, it crowned a mighty crag that dominated all the valley. On three sides the Dalborough River girdled the crag close, forming a natural moat; on the fourth, or south side, the hill fell sheer in a vertical cliff, which neither horse nor man could scale. The rear wall of the bailey terminated, at each corner, in a high turret which commanded cliff and river with battlements and menacing arrow-slots.

The highway nestled so close to river and crag that missiles hurled from the castle-walls could sweep well across it; and nowhere did the forest approach close enough to the fortress to screen an enemy's attack. The whole valley was almost treeless for a circuit of a mile from the walls. Beyond that distance, the wood loomed dark and lowering.

To enter the fortress, Thomas must pass the entire west wall—from which helmeted heads peered down upon him—and turn into a private road that wound sharply to the right, approaching the castle from the north. This was the only entrance, guarded by the river. Thomas stopped on the bank.

"Ho!" he shouted lustily. "Open for an envoy from his Grace of Canterbury!"

After a moment's silence, there rose the screaming of iron chains on iron pulleys, and the drawbridge slowly sank till it spanned the stream. As Thomas rode across, the great gate opened.

Through it he rode into a rectangular, roofed court, with massive walls. There was no portcullis, for none was needed. This strong forecourt, or barbican, was a sure defense so long as the drawbridge was raised. Even now, in time of peace, the barbican was filled with mailed men-at-arms, who fell back on both sides to let Becket ride up the wide stone ramp into the great square bailey. A sergeant, taking his horse by the bridle, led him in.

Since the barbican gave on the stream itself, it was level with the valley; but the ramp sloped up to a terraced second level, on which the bailey walls had been erected. The hill had been so graded that a space along the west and south sides was level; and here were the stables and a narrow parade ground. Attended by the sergeant, Thomas crossed the paved court to the stables, leaving his horse in the care of a groom. Straight before him rose the massive round tower, or keep, that formed the citadel.

Once within its portal, which was as strong as the outer gate, he was taken in charge by a second officer, who led him to the earl's own chamber just beneath the battlements. He had waited but a moment when the door opened, and Thomas rose to greet the greatest man in the North.

Robert, Earl of Lincoln, was a man well into middle age, tall, strongly made, and marked with the scars of war. His face was that of a man who knows no physical fear; but the shifting glance betrayed a lack of moral fiber. Loss of life he feared little; but loss of lands or prestige he feared much. He met the archbishop's envoy courteously, but with uneasy eyes.

"Have you not done with me yet, Thomas Becket?" he asked a little wearily.

"No, my good lord, nor ever will, till you are Duke Henry's man," Becket answered

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bluntly. "Twice you have given me evasive answers; now I have better hope to win you, for I bring weighty news."

The earl seated himself before a little table, on whose surface his fingers drummed nervously.

"I do not know," he said, "what news can bind King Stephen's hands, or make my walls impregnable to the assaults of his wild son Eustace."

"Eustace is in France," Thomas replied, "where he can neither see nor hear what is done in Dalborough Keep. Will it please my lord to look on these?"

From under his monk's robe he drew a number of parchment scrolls.

"This first," he began, "is an enumeration of the troops, engines, ships, and supplies with which the duke can invade England. The details are in code; but the totals are clear. Duke Henry can count on a well-equipped army of twelve thousand men. That, with the forces already pledged to him in England, will enable him to invade successfully——"

"When? How soon?"

"This Summer!"

The earl's face gleamed with sudden light.

"That is good news!" he exclaimed. "I am Henry's man at heart, as I told you when you came to me last Summer. But I must be sure of success before I march on a road from which there may be no returning."

Becket's lip curled.

"Less powerful men than you have joined us without fear."

"Aye, well they might, with less to lose——"

"And less to gain! Look you, my lord: Count Eustace, and the turbulent barons, have for thirteen years shed so much English blood that it is as if our country bled from a thousand shallow wounds. If you aid Duke Henry, your fame will bring so many other wavering nobles to our side that Stephen will not dare resort to arms, and Henry may become king peacefully.

"Then our country's wounds will be bound up, and she will become whole again. But if you hesitate longer, Henry must come with a force scarce stronger than Stephen's; there will be ruthless civil war, and our already bleeding country will suffer a wound that may strike to her heart! Be bold, and set all on the hazard for such a cause! Here—" he drew forth a larger scroll, the copy of the papal sanction—"here is something to embolden the faintest spirit!"

The earl, who had small skill in letters, went slowly over the copy, while Becket translated its priestly Latin for him.

"Aye," the earl admitted. "I can make out *Henricus*, which is Henry, and *rex*, which must mean king, since it stands on all coins minted here in England. This is indeed a mighty document!"

"And one which will bring over many who now waver," Becket reminded him. "Will you, who are greatest, be the last? Small risk will you run, when your mere name will make our cause too strong for Stephen to assail!"

But, seeing hesitation still clouding Robert's brow, he added darkly:

"If you refuse your help, and Henry becomes king without it, you may lose even more than you gain by joining him. Behold!"

He enrolled the last scroll, and handed it to the troubled earl. Even Robert could read it. On the left, one below another, were the names of the principal estates and castles in England; on the right, opposite each of these, were the names and coats-of-arms of knights and noblemen.

"These are the gifts King Henry will give to those who aid him," Thomas explained. "There is your name, my lord, over against that of the most glittering fief in a king's possession—the Dukedom of Northumberland! Think well before you refuse it! Note, too, that your name is written in red—which means that you have not yet taken the step which is to earn you that splendid gift."

For a long time the earl sat in anxious thought; while Thomas, in his inmost heart, prayed that Pierre might come soon with news that Paketon, the outlaw, had brought his four hundred archers to Henry's banner. That surely would turn the scale. Earl Robert was ready to be won, if he could only be sure that he could hold off the vengeful Eustace's forces until Duke Henry came with his host. But it was too soon for Pierre.

Nor was Pierre needed, as it seemed; for the earl looked up with eyes that were resolute at last.

"I am with you!" he exclaimed. "Say to Duke Henry that he may count on me, and

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on every man who follows me! And it may be——"

A knock sounded at the door.

"Who calls?" the earl cried impatiently.

A hand fumbled with the latch; but, finding the door barred, he who stood without shouted through the panels—

"A messenger from King Stephen, who brooks no delay!"

Instantly Becket snatched up the papers from the table, and hid them under his gown. As he looked up, he caught the look of fear in the earl's eyes, and read the man's timid heart. All his work was lost if the message from the king had to do with the discoveries of the spy who, posing as Loriot, had learned his plans.

"The king's man must not find you here," the earl gasped. "Quick! This way! I will give you my answer later."

Thomas resisted his clutch.

"You have given your answer," he retorted. "A man of honor keeps his word."

But the earl, caught thus in the midst of conspiracy, was too disturbed to heed him. Fumbling with a section of the oaken panels that faced the wall, Robert pressed a spring, and a well-concealed door swung silently into the room, exposing a secret stair within the stonework. Before Thomas could speak again, the earl thrust him within, and closed the panel.

Thomas promptly clapped his ear to the wood. Voices murmured in the chamber beyond; but they were so subdued that he could make out no single word. Long he listened, but in vain.

He had been hurled from the height of hope into despair. Knowing the earl's timidity, his fear of the brutal vengeance of Eustace if he should be known as a friend to Henry, Thomas could not doubt that all was lost. There could be no doubt that the pretended Loriot had revealed to King Stephen the contents of the archbishop's letters—no doubt that Stephen's messenger was sent to persuade or frighten the earl into keeping aloof from Henry's party. For one of those letters had specifically mentioned the need for Thomas to win the earl.

There was only one consolation: Becket himself was safe, if he could remain in his hiding-place till the king's man was gone. Such a man as Earl Robert, confronted with the king's message, would not only refrain from giving Becket up but would deny his very presence in the castle.

Anxious to clear himself from suspicion, he would insist that he had never had any dealings with Henry's agents. And the only evidence against such a denial would be the discovery of Becket in the castle. The earl had only to keep him hidden, and the royal envoy would go back to London convinced that the earl had never harbored an enemy of Stephen's.

It was dark and cold in the secret stairway, and Thomas was not used to inaction. He resolved to explore the stair, in the hope that whatever place it led to—for it must lead somewhere—might yield him some inkling of the messenger's errand.

Cautiously, his fingers touching the wall, he groped his way down step by step. The absolute blackness told him that the stair was built in the inner wall, since otherwise the arrow-slots pierced in the outer face, and giving on the defense-platforms, would allow the daylight to enter.

He had descended perhaps two-thirds the length of the stair when once more he heard muffled voices, but this time below him. Anxiously he felt his way down, till at last he stood on a level stone surface. Now the voices were clear, and two tiny rays of light, close together, filtered in from the inner wall. Peering through the holes from which the light came, he looked into the guard-room on the ground floor of the keep.

At once he understood the meaning of the secret stair. Dalborough keep had been built in the troubled times of Henry I, when many a treacherous noble, false to the king, had been betrayed to that king by his own bribed garrison. This was one of those places of espial from which the lord of a castle, himself unobserved, could see and hear all that his men-at-arms did when they thought him safe in his chamber.

But it was not the earl's men-at-arms who interested Thomas now; it was a group of spearmen, twelve in number, who sat with them, laughing and drinking. These twelve, fully mailed and well-armed, bore on their tunics the badge of King Stephen.

ONCE well within the forest, Pierre was forced to dismount, and lead his horse. In the disturbed years of Stephen's reign these woods—once a royal forest—had gone untended. The undergrowth was thick, and the lower branches of the trees obstructed the almost obscured paths. Here, under giant oaks

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ıd beeches, the sun found scant access; ıtches of snow still lay here and there, ıd the chilly air bit through Pierre's mail ıd clothing.

He took no pains to go quietly. Instead e burst into lusty song, as if the gloomy ɔrest held none but himself. Well he knew ıat it is not good to ride in unheard and nexpected upon desperate men.

After two hours he came to a brook, hich ran roughly at right angles to his ourse. Here he paused; but reflecting that he brook must ultimately bring him out f the forest, he decided to cross. He had ot left the stream three hundred yards ehind, when a whistling hum pierced the ir, and something thudded close to his ight hand. Stopping, Pierre saw an arrow quivering in the bark of a huge beech. nstantly he placed his hands on his horse's ıeck, well away from his sword hilt.

Gliding like a shadow from the undergrowth, a russet-clad bowman seized his ɔridle. At almost the same moment strong ıands were laid on his shoulders, and Pierre ound himself between two sturdy fellows, ɔlad like the first, and like him armed with ɔow and sword.

With no resistance Pierre let one of his ɔaptors unbuckle his belt, and remove sword ınd dagger. A calm smile rested on his lips as he watched the keen eyes of these fierce-faced men appraise his mighty limbs and the good steel rings of his armor.

"King's man?" one asked him in Norman-French.

"King's enemy," Pierre answered. "You serve Sir Richard Paketon? Good; take me to him."

The outlaw scrutinized him doubtfully.

"Shall we bind him?" he asked of his comrades; but without shifting his eyes from the prisoner.

"Not without blows," Pierre spoke up for himself. "I come as an envoy."

The outlaws exchanged a few sentences in a language Pierre could not understand—English, the tongue of the common folk. At last, with a nod, he who held the horse moved forward. The others urged Pierre to follow.

Their course turned north again, and somewhat east; so that it was half an hour before they reached the stream again, farther down than Pierre had crossed it.

"Here is Swart Beck," one told him. "You shall soon see our master."

For perhaps ten minutes they followed the right bank of Swart Beck, till they came out into a clearing, one side of which was bounded by the brook, across which loomed the primeval forest.

Half-way across the glade, and near the brook, stood a well-made house of logs and thatch, surrounded by many smaller huts of wattle and daub. As Pierre and his captors came out into the sunlight, a throng of armed men, rough, shock-headed archers, ran up to meet them, while others poured from the huts to learn the cause of the uproar.

Roused by the alarm, some one within the large house threw open the door and looked out. Seeing the mailed Frenchman with his captors, he shouted to them in English.

"Come," said one to Pierre. "There is our master."

Thus Pierre first set eyes on Sir Richard Paketon. His first impression was that of two flaming eyes, sharp as swords; and a forest of long white beard and hair. But next he noted the tall, lean body, erect and lithe, with a rippling play of muscle under the wrinkled tunic.

Last of all, as he came closer, Pierre saw how broad and high was the brow, banded with white where the helmet came down; the high, arched nose, and the long, square lines of cheek and jaw. Out of his own knowledge of men Pierre recognized one who would bear no trifling, but must be told the truth straight, swift, entire.

"I am Pierre Faidit," he announced without waiting to be questioned, "called Pierre of the Sword, and squire to Henry of Normandy."

The blazing eyes gazed straight into his own.

"Then why do you not wear his badge?"

Sir Richard's question came like a sword-thrust.

"Because it is not a safe token to wear in Stephen's England."

Paketon smiled frostily.

"What do you want with me?"

"Your aid," Pierre answered bluntly, "and the men who follow you, to help Duke Henry strike the crown from Stephen's head."

"How do I know," the outlaw countered, "that you speak truth? Where are your proofs? The name you say is yours is indeed the name of a man renowned for

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soldierly prowess and for loyalty; and Henry Plantagenet is a master I would fain serve; but what if you be some swaggering rascal, who has stolen the name of Pierre Faidit, and now bears lying tales to lure me to destruction?"

"I offer you two proofs," Pierre answered. "Ride with me to Dalborough Castle, where you shall find Thomas Becket, with letters to the earl from the Archbishop of Canterbury. Or give me my sword, which your men took from me; strip off my armor, and let any three of your best swordsmen assail me. If they draw a drop of my blood, if I do not disarm them all within the quarter of an hour, hang me for an impostor!"

The old knight laughed aloud.

"Nay, I believe you! Only Pierre of the Sword could stand such a test, or would dare propose it. You may ride back to your master, and tell him that Richard Paketon and his bowmen will fly to his banner so soon as it is spread to the English breeze. Nay, thank me not. I am overjoyed to have so fair a vengeance on Stephen and his accursed son. And, may God give me but one fair sword-stroke at Eustace the Devil!"

Pierre grasped the old man's hand.

"Two things remain," he said. "Your men have removed my saddle-bags, which contain Duke Henry's gold. I crave your leave to give that gold to you to be expended——"

"Not another word!"

Paketon cut him short with a look of fury.

"Have you misread me so foully as to think my sword can be bought? I fight for two things only—honor, and revenge. The very silver that enriches my followers is wrested from the oppressors of the poor, not from honest men."

Pierre's own eyes grew cold, meeting the outlaw's full and hard.

"To be expended," he resumed calmly, "in buying armor for your men, that they may stand more stanchly against Stephen's mailed spearmen. I ask you not to take reward, but to bring my master well-armed allies!"

"It shall be done," the outlaw promised. "Your other wish?"

"Some proof," Pierre answered, "for the Earl of Lincoln, your kinsman, that you are with us."

"That shall you have also. I can not write, but I can send a soldier's token. My kinsman will recognize it, for he himself gave it me long ago."

He took a richly chased dagger from his girdle, and handed it to Pierre.

"Now you had best go; for your friend Becket may have sore need of you."

Pierre stared at him.

"What mean you, sir?" he exclaimed.

"Last night," Paketon answered, "certain of my men went to Dalby Town on my errands. From the village, which lies halfway across the valley, they heard a noise as of many horsemen; and, creeping toward the tumult, they penetrated into the wood east of the town. There they saw a great force of spearmen making camp—seemingly king's men. Whether Stephen hunts me, or whether he hunts you and Becket, I know not.

"In the latter case his troopers could scarce find a better ambush than where they lie, commanding the highroad along which your friend rode toward the castle. It were well for you to reach Dalborough Keep as fast as you may, and there learn whether Becket reached its gates in safety. If not, ride back to me, and my archers will lay a counter-ambush to rescue him."

"By the five wounds!" cried Pierre. "If he is caught, the papers he bears will destroy him, and ruin all he has toiled for! My horse, quickly!"

"Ho! Peter Fox!" Paketon called.

One of the outlaws who had brought Pierre thither ran up, and the old man ordered —

"Fetch Pierre's horse, and go with him."

Mounting, Pierre turned his horse's head straight toward the castle; but Sir Richard caught his bridle.

"Not that way," he warned. "The king's men lie in wait too close to the road; and there is marshy ground all along the river. To be safe, you must ride north till you are well past the stream, then west to the highway, and so south again to the castle. Farewell!"

Cursing the ill fortune that condemned him to a slow pace through the forest, when Becket's very life, and his master's crown, might even now be in the balance, Pierre rode down along Swart Beck toward the river. The man detailed to guide him clung to his stirrup, and so they came at last to the river and its pebbly ford.

"Here I leave you," the outlaw said. "Across the stream is the earl's land. Ride

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orth for a bow-shot, turn as the forest urns, and strike the road within the forest. o you may keep safely out of sight till ou are within two bow-shots of the castle."

With a word of thanks Pierre rode into ie stream.

On the other side the wood was much iore open and better cared for, as befits nobleman's preserve. Pierre reddened his ours and galloped down the long aisles of ak and beech, keeping just inside the ielter of the trees.

His heart was heavy, his nerves tight rung. Well he knew that it was for him nd for Becket the ambush was laid. It all ung together with the murder of Loriot, ie surreptitious reading of Theobald's letrs by the spy who impersonated Loriot, and ho must have set Stephen's spearmen on heir track. Speed, speed, was essential now.

Pierre must first learn Becket's fate; and he had not come to the castle, must get ord back to Paketon in time for a rescue. f the king's men had seized Becket, they ight well get away with their prisoner beore rescue could come, for Paketon's unnounted archers could not overtake horsemen.

Nor would it avail anything to attack he royal troops if they had not captured homas. That would merely put Stephen n his guard so much the sooner, and perhaps frighten the prudent earl away from Henry's cause. Pierre's first task must be o find whether his friend had reached the astle.

The early Spring day was waning fast s he rounded the westerly curve toward he highway. He was still about fifty yards within the forest, and meant to remain thus ar from the open valley till he reached the oad, which could not be far away now. He spurred his mount again, and bent low over its neck.

The horse burst into splendid speed; but suddenly, in full career, its stride faltered. Half-stumbling, it recovered and plunged on; but Pierre tugged hard at the bridle, brought its head round, and sprang from the saddle. The animal's rocking plunge had told him it was mortally hurt. Even as his feet touched ground, the horse fell, the feathered butt of an arrow protruding from its flank.

Leaping to the nearest tree, Pierre set his back against the mighty trunk and drew his sword. From the forest all around him streamed armored men-at-arms, their mail and leveled weapons gleaming faintly in the half-gloom.

The first attack came swiftly, as soon as the foremost spearmen reached him. They lunged fiercely, but their attack seemed rather an attempt to hold him in play than to kill him. Pierre had no such scruples. Eustace's badge on their breasts was enough to rouse his fury.

As one and another fell before his lightning thrusts, the rest dropped back in consternation. Well out of range of his point, they formed a wall all round him, a wall that became a complete, dense circle as more and more ran up to aid their comrades. No man spoke a word; but the savage faces and the ring of spear points spoke eloquently for them.

Pierre's eyes roved round in vain search for a weak spot in that living wall, for the slightest gap through which he might hope to fight his way. At once he saw how desperate was his plight, saw that he had no choice but to surrender or die fighting. His enemies waited for the hopelessness of the situation to sink into his heart; and at last an officer advanced one pace from the circle of steel.

"Yield, Pierre Faidit!" he commanded.

"In whose name?" the Frenchman retorted. "The king's? Ye seem Count Eustace's men, but the count is in France!"

The officer laughed, and his merriment echoed from a score of bearded lips.

"In France, ha? My master has not been out of England in six months! Well were you duped, you and the knave Becket! My master himself spread the report of his passage to Boulogne, and took good care that his ship was seen to leave Winchelsea as if he were on it. Meantime he lay hid snugly in London, till his agent—who had shown him the archbishop's letters, and then delivered them to Becket to avoid suspicion—came back from Caen with word that you were on the way to Dalborough. Aye, the very moment of your departure from Theobald's presence ye were watched and followed, till your direction was known. Now give up your sword, or you will not live to clasp its hilt again!"

Pierre had already made up his mind to yield. From death there is no return, but from captivity a shrewd man may find a way to free himself. But he played for time, hoping to win further information.

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"What will Count Eustace do with me?" he asked, expecting an answer that would challenge all his courage.

"Give you your choice between death by burning and a captaincy in his service! I counsel you to choose his commission. My master rewards good men well, and proud will he be to call Pierre of the Sword his officer!"

"And what of Becket? You have taken him also?"

The officer's eye gleamed wickedly.

"Not yet; but we shall have him soon. Last night, as we lay hid in the wood west of the town, Count Eustace brewed a plan better than our first intent to take you both as you rode toward the castle. We broke camp at midnight, and came here, from whence we could watch for you to enter the castle. We knew not that you would come separately; but as soon as Becket entered Dalborough gate, and had time to come to speech with the earl, my master followed him thither, craving admission as a messenger from the king! By this time he has doubtless caught the two conspirators, Thomas the Traitor and Robert the Malcontent, in the midst of their foul plots! Had he taken Becket alone, he would have had no evidence against the earl; but now he has them both fast!"

"In that case Eustace will scarce leave the castle alive!" Pierre retorted.

"Aye, he will! In cunning he is more than a match for Duke Henry's jackals. But come, throw down your sword! Time presses!"

Silently Pierre unfastened his belt and threw it, with his dagger, at the officer's feet. His sword followed, then Paketon's poniard. The hostile men-at-arms ran in, seized him and stripped off his mail, and searched his clothing.

"He bears nothing!" one cried; but their captain merely nodded. "Then Becket has the papers," he answered. "Our lord will know how to win both them and him! Bind the prisoner!"

The spearmen obeyed. Without loss of time they lashed Pierre hand and foot, and bound him to the tree.

"You have the wit of the fiend himself, Pierre Faidit!" the officer jibed. "Men tell of the prisons from which you have escaped, the foes you have befooled; but from me you will not escape! Here, Jaques, Lenoir! Stand guard over him! And look to it that he does not so much as breathe without your seeing him, for he is cunning as Lucifer! If he gets away, ye shall burn over a slow fire!"

Two burly spearmen sat themselves down, one on either side of Pierre. As soon as they had taken their places, with their weapons leveled at the captive, their comrades melted into the wood. Only the officer tarried.

"One thing, Pierre Faidit: Often have I heard of this sword of yours, with which you have done wonderous deeds. I would fain have it for myself. If you accept my master's offer of life and a commission, I dare not keep your sword without your consent."

"Speak a good word to your master for Becket," Pierre answered heavily, "and you may have the sword!"

"I will, though it is useless. The count has sworn that Becket shall die by the torment!"

Snatching up the sword, he vanished after his men.

From the forest Pierre could hear the tramping of horses, the clatter of mail, and the buzz of voices; but nothing could be seen. Only by turning his head—and that was painful, so tight was he bound—could he see the men who watched him. One of them turned upon him angrily.

"A fine night's sport you have robbed us of!" he grumbled. "It is ill biding here with you, while our fellows have the taking and the loot of a rich castle!"

Pierre's heart beat violently. So this was Eustace's plan! Eustace himself was in the castle to surprize Becket and the earl together—doubtless in the hope that by laying accusation against the earl he could win from his royal father a grant to the rich fief of Lincoln; or perhaps he meant to use the castle to drive a ——'s bargain with the earl. When the spurious Loriot showed Eustace the archbishop's letters, the count had for a moment held in his hands precious proof of the plot between Duke Henry and the archbishop; but he had been forced to let his proof go, in order that those very letters might lure Becket to England and into his toils.

Now, if Eustace could seize the castle and the earl's person as well as Becket, he could force the earl himself to turn Crown's evidence against both Becket and the archbishop. To convict the mighty prelate of

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ason mighty proof was needed; and stace might well hope to buy the earl's timony by offering to pardon him and tore his castle. And now, by some foul :k, the count's troopers were to make tters certain by seizing castle, Becket, l, and all! But how Eustace could pre- it the earl's men from taking his life en his trick became apparent, Pierre ild not understand; nor did he dare ask e two who guarded him. Their suspicions ist not be roused, for something might t be done with them.

Long and despairingly he pondered, with- t finding any way out either for himself for Becket. All seemed hopelessly lost. ith Becket and the earl in the hands of stace's butchers, and Becket's papers ptured, Duke Henry's cause was ruined. ot only the Earl of Lincoln, but every ight and noble whose name was on his its would lose lands or life; and the party England that favored Henry would be oken. And for Becket, and Pierre him- lf, nothing would remain but a shameful ath.

Not for an instant did Pierre consider ving himself by taking service with Eus- ce. He had grown to manhood under the nner of a man who held honor above all ings on earth; and the ideals of Alphonse Toulouse had become his own. He would ie a thousand deaths rather than stain his onor with treason to Duke Henry, rather an doom himself to a life of sin and shame ich as Count Eustace demanded of his llowers. But worse than death for him- lf was the fate that overhung his friend, he loss of England's crown to his master. nd all this must come; there was no help.

"THERE will be wine and gold in Dalborough Keep," the soldier Jaques muttered.

"Be silent, pig!" Lenoir snarled at him. 'Why speak of that which is not for us? f we get the licking of the empty pot we hall be lucky!"

A sudden ray of hope shone in on the lack gloom that oppressed Pierre's heart. With tense eagerness he ventured a ques- ion.

"Your master will not be so mad as to let you assail now, while he is in the earl's hands?"

Jaques snorted.

"Aye, he will! The assault will begin when all is properly dark. But he runs no risk; be sure of that."

"When all is dark!"

It was almost dark now. Allowing for an hour or two more, so that the deeper blackness of advanced night might conceal the treacherous approach of the attacking force, there was still all too little time for Pierre to venture anything, even if he were not helpless. The hour of doom was drawing on fast, when any help, when the shrewdest plan, would come too late.

But the word "gold," as it had fallen from Jaques' lips, had brought a glimmer of hope. Pierre's nimble brain worked on that hint, till at last a scheme developed full-rounded in his mind. But it must be put into instant effect; it must work with absolute smoothness, if it were to succeed. Yet in it alone was any hope.

"If you are the prudent, ready lads you look to be," he muttered softly, so that his voice barely reached his guards, "you may have rarer sport and richer loot this night than any castle can bring you!"

Lenoir got up, and kicked him heavily in the side.

"You can not make fools of us!" he growled. "Did not Captain Alain warn us against your tricks?"

Pierre forced a low laugh.

"So be it, if you wish to lose your fortune," he whispered. "But you need not strike a man bound whom you would not dare face free."

Lenoir raised his fist, but the other guard held him back.

"Let him alone," he protested. "Did you not hear Alain say that Count Eustace will give him a chance to join us, and a commission? You would be finely served, if Faidit should come to be captain over you!"

"I see well," Pierre chuckled, "that one of you has sense. Be assured, Lenoir, that I shall ask to have you in my troop when I accept the count's commission!"

"I knew it," Jaques muttered. "What man would not prefer a merry life to a bitter death? When you have your captaincy, good sir, remember Jaques, who would not see you mishandled."

"I will not forget you," Pierre assured him. "Moreover, I will forgive your comrade, if he and you will do a service for me."

"No service," Jaques himself broke in

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suspiciously. "We will not let you go. Count Eustace would destroy us!"

"I do not ask you to let me go," Pierre retorted. "Have you not yourself said that a merry life is better than death? You have seen the common armor I wear, and can judge that Duke Henry's service is a lean one. And I have seen the jewels your Captain Alain wears. Truly Count Eustace is a kind master! Nay, do not let me go, for I do not wish it!"

"What then?" Lenoir broke in. "You spoke of loot?"

"Aye did I! The service I ask is one you can do easily; but the reward is great. It will mean that you must leave me unguarded; but you need not fear to leave a bound man; and your officer is busy marshaling his men for the assault. Moreover, I will remember your good offices when I have the count's commission."

"What is this service that means loot?" the two men asked together.

"This," Pierre explained: "On my way hither I heard that you lay in ambush about the castle; and to be sure against loss I left a great sum of the duke's gold——"

"Gold!" the ruffians gasped. "Where?"

"In safe keeping," Pierre resumed. "Now, being bound here, I can not get it again. If your master bids you ride away as soon as the castle is taken, I may never see it more. Or if he, or your comrades, hear of it, the share they will give you will be small. But if two good fellows would slip off through the dark, go to the hiding-place, and fetch the gold, I would share it equally with them."

"Where is it?" the two asked with feverish greed. "How much? Is it near enough to fetch back here before our captain returns from taking the castle?"

"Enough to make the three of us rich for life. You can fetch it, and return, in two hours. It will take longer than that to storm the castle."

"Where? Where?"

"I left it in a house in the forest, southeast of the river," Pierre answered, "in the care of an old man. Surely you two stout carles can overpower an old dotard, and fetch the gold here before your captain returns!"

For a moment there was silence, broken only by the covetous mutterings of the two spearmen, Pierre waited in the tensest anxiety. Yet he need not have doubted the outcome. Such men, without scruple or virtue, held to their master by fear and greed rather than loyalty, could not resist the golden bait. Lenoir rose swiftly, disappeared with cautious steps among the trees, and returned.

"All is well," he reported. "Alain indeed marshals the companies for the assault. No one will see or know."

If Pierre had been able to read their minds, he would have seen how they wavered between two courses; to go for the gold, fetch it back, and divide with Pierre when he should have been taken into their lord's favor and service; or to take all the gold for themselves, desert, and flee far away where neither Pierre not Eustace could ever find them. And they decided, each in his own dark heart, for the second course. For a little while they whispered together; then Lenoir spoke up—

"We will fetch it for you; but we need better directions."

Swiftly Pierre expounded to the two rascals the way to—Sir Richard Paketon's camp. So clear were his directions that even a child could not have missed the way. Nor did he fail to caution them against a short cut through the marsh. He wanted them to reach Sir Richard, and he did not care if they never came back.

And every word he said to them was true. The trap they entered so eagerly was set without falsehood, baited with their own greed.

"We go!" Jaques told him; and the two faded into the wood.

IN THE same moment Alain, who was in command of the assault, received the report of two scouts who had crept up, in the darkness, to the castle moat.

"The drawbridge is not yet lowered," they reported. "We were not seen, nor is there any trace that we are suspected; but the time has not come."

A hum of disappointment rippled over the waiting men-at-arms, as they stood gathered in companies at the edge of the forest.

"Then we must wait," Alain answered. "Count Eustace hoped to have all ready for us by an hour after dark; so the way should be clear now. But we can not strike till the moat is bridged for us. Go back, lads; creep close, and watch well. As soon as the

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vbridge falls, speed hither, and we will
m."
ut the waiting columns stood long in
r places, fretting with impatience; and
two full hours no further word came
a their scouts.

CONVINCED that he himself was safe, Thomas Becket had only one fear—that Pierre Faidit would arrive ore the king's envoy left the castle. In dark hiding-place he could not tell how time passed, but day must be waning. rre's coming would ruin all. As soon as gate was opened to him, Stephen's armen would seize him, and the royal oy would guess that Becket too was in castle. Their safety depended on the ssenger's leaving before Pierre came in it. As this thought grew upon him, ket became alarmed.

As he pondered the situation, he groped way back up the stair, resolved to listen e more behind the earl's panels. But murmur of voices went on and on, too to be understood. If only the mes-ger would go!

As if in answer to his wish, Thomas heard hair scrape on the stone floor, and right er it the clank of mailed feet. Then came sound of the heavy door, closing rd. Shaking with excitement, Thomas de his way down again as fast as he ld in the dark, hoping to get a glimpse the royal envoy through the peepholes, he departed.

He had hardly taken up his position when e mailed feet clanged on the threshold of e guard-room, and Earl Robert, accom-nied by a man in full armor, entered from e main stairway. Eagerly Thomas peeped upon them, his eyes seeking the envoy's e. But the man's features were so con-aled by the nasal of his helmet, and the eek-pieces of ring mail, that he was un-cognizable across the wide guard-room.

As he came in, however, the twelve ldiers of his escort rose, shoving back their e-mugs; and they seemed to glance at the voy, and at each other, as if something as expected of them. But it was the earl ho made the mystery clear.

"I tell you before your men, my lord, that take this ill of you," he said querulously. You enter my gates not openly and frank-, but under a false badge and playing a lse part. Not till you are alone with me do you unwrap your cloak from your face and reveal yourself; and then your first words are an accusation of disloyalty!"

The envoy's answer was mild enough, his voice meek and courteous:

"I pray your forgiveness, Robert. You have convinced me of your good faith. I take your word that the men I seek are not under your roof."

Becket's heart beat so loud that it seemed the whole guard-room must hear it. No need now to see the pretended envoy's face—he had heard that voice many a time at Stephen's court, when he had visited there with the archbishop. The king's messenger was the king's son, Eustace, whom he had believed absent in France! Now, if Pierre came, all was lost indeed—unless Eustace went speedily. But that hope died soon.

"If you will permit me, Robert," Count Eustace resumed, "I will sup with you before taking the road again; and while your cook is preparing, I will make a survey of your castle, that I may report to my father how well you hold it for him."

As he spoke, his eyes ran restlessly about the room, as if to spy out some secret.

Somewhat confusedly the earl assented. He could scarce refuse without revealing too openly his anxiety to be rid of his perilous guest.

And now Becket was torn by fresh pangs of fear; Pierre must certainly come before Eustace was ready to go. Even if he did not, Eustace had not finished with Dalborough Castle His wish to survey the place was a poorly concealed pretext; he still believed that Pierre and Thomas were hidden somewhere within its walls, and meant to find them.

What would he do when he failed to find them? He could not bluntly accuse the earl of hiding them, in the face of the earl's denial. Robert of Lincoln was not too proud to lie to save himself, but he would be forced to resent a charge of falsehood. And Eustace had too few men with him to use force.

But Thomas was convinced that the matter would not end so easily; he knew Eustace too well. He had studied his enemies carefully, both King Stephen and his son; had met them often both at London and at the palace in Winchester. He knew their methods, their characters.

Eustace, for all his almost insane cruelty,

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was cool, cunning and persistent. Whatever object he had in view he pursued with unrelenting determination. No, Eustace would not give up his hunt for the men his spy had betrayed to him, even if the closest search proved vain. If Thomas knew his man Eustace would not leave Dalborough till he had won his purpose—till both Becket and Pierre were in his hands.

Reading through the man's motives to his probable actions, Thomas felt a sure premonition that, failing to find his prey, Eustace would attempt some startling coup—would perhaps even attempt to take the castle, that he might search it at leisure, even if he had to tear down stone from stone. That was Eustace's way.

If it came to that, Thomas was caught, and Pierre would be caught too. Safe in his hiding-place, so long as the earl kept his head, Thomas was caught like a rat in a trap if Eustace found some way to make himself master of Dalborough. Such things had happened—happened more than once, in that stormy age. Treacherous cunning might well succeed where more honest methods failed. If Thomas were caught, and his papers found on him——

Something must be done, and quickly—something that would give Thomas a chance to watch, to detect, to forestall his enemy's plots. Eustace would hardly have come on so important an errand with but twelve men, especially if he meditated force as a last resort.

Shut up where he was, and in his present garb, Thomas could do nothing. Swiftly he came to a resolve. He stole up the stair, and pushed at the panel that shut him off from the earl's chamber. Having been in that room already, and seen no Becket there, the count would scarce look there again.

The panel would not move; and Thomas ran his hands all round its frame in patient, systematic search. At last it gave, and opened wide.

Two candles burned low in the earl's chamber. This was ominous; it must have been dark long for the lights to burn so far down. But the room was empty; and Thomas, tiptoeing to the door, shot the bar. He now searched through the room for what he sought, and knew would be there—a chest of arms.

At length he came upon it in the recess which held the earl's high bed. Throwing up the cover, he searched through the chest till he found a plain suit of mail, a helme and a heavy sword. Stripping off his rob he donned the mail quickly, stuffed h monk's gown into the chest, and closed th lid.

Now he was as well masked as Eustac his features hidden by nasal and mail. H could pass—especially in poor light—fo one of the garrison. The earl's men num bered fully three hundred, so it was no likely that the earl himself would pick hi out from all his men-at-arms. And the spo where he planned to watch was one whe he might masquerade with little fear—th battlements, where he could keep out of th torchlight a good part of the time.

Unbarring the door, he stole out into th corridor. Eustace and the earl might b anywhere about the castle; he would do wel to reach the tower top swiftly. The corrido was empty, save for a single spearman who stood under a torch at the entrance to a side passage. With a nod, Thomas went by him into the passage, which led to one of the defense-platforms for the third story. From this platform, with its loopholes, its piles of stones, its sheaves of arrows, and its half dozen men-at-arms, a stair in the wall led to the battlements.

As Thomas mounted the steps, a sergeant hailed him:

"What now? The guard does not shift for half an hour!"

"Earl's order," Thomas answered; and none challenged him further.

All was dark out on the plain, save for a few twinkling lights to the south, in Dal Town. A few scattered torches burned in their cressets along the merlons; but Thomas avoided these, though even in their light only his eyes and cheek-bones could be seen.

Only a few sentinels paced along the parapet. The earl was at peace with all his neighbors, and strict discipline and vigilance were not needed. There was a strong guard in the barbican, but most of the garrison were in the keep guard-room or in the bailey.

Thomas greeted the sentries curtly, muttered, "Earl's orders," to each, and at once devoted himself to a keen, close scrutiny of the dark plain beyond the river. But the distance and the dark were enough to hide an army.

That was just what Thomas feared—that they did hide an army—or at least several

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hundred of the wild riders—half-banditti—that followed Eustace's banner. Slowly he made the circuit of the walls, again and again, watching for the least movement out beyond the gate, or on the plain around. But no sign could he see, either of hostile troops or of Pierre. What could have happened to Pierre?

Becket's uneasiness was by no means allayed. It was good that Pierre had not come, to fall into his enemy's hands; but it were very ill indeed if Paketon's outlaws had slain him. The hours passed; and Thomas kept up his vigil ceaselessly.

The guard had changed long since. Midnight came, and nothing happened. At last torches flickered down in the bailey; and by their light Thomas saw horses being led from the stables that lined the court. Twelve—thirteen horses. Eustace was going, then! But would he go without a shrewd, bold stroke to win his ends?

Swiftly Thomas strode to the stair, and hurried down to the guard-room. If the count did meditate some treachery, there must be at least one watchful pair of eyes on him. In the guard-room, among the earl's men-at-arms, Becket knew himself safe from detection. He was one of many, all armed alike.

The keep gate opened. On each side of it stood a spearman with a torch. Between them walked Eustace and the earl; and Eustace's men followed. A wild fear seized Thomas that the earl would be seized at the barbican, carried off in a wild gallop, and forced to reveal his dealings with Stephen's enemies. But the earl seemed suspicious also, for he accompanied his guest only as far as the arch between bailey and barbican, and there bade him farewell.

Eustace's horses were already at the open gate, and the drawbridge was slowly lowering. Four sturdy soldiers labored at the winches, to keep the heavy bridge from falling too swiftly for the good of its chains.

Mingling with the throng of men-at-arms that pressed about to see the count's departure, Thomas crossed the bailey soon after the count himself; but he did not stop when the earl stopped. With bold assurance he took a torch from a soldier, and advanced into the barbican as if to give Eustace better light to mount by; but he kept his face turned aside.

With a final hand-clasp the king's son turned from his host, found his stirrup, and mounted. His twelve spearmen mounted after him, their horses filling the space between the drawbridge winches and the gate. Fearing an attempt to damage the winches, Thomas looked back toward them; but one by one the count's riders clattered over the threshold on to the drawbridge, and disappeared into the night. Eustace was gone, and no treachery attempted.

Drawing a deep breath of relief, Thomas left the gate and approached the earl. Removing his helmet, he smiled confidently at Robert of Lincoln.

"Becket!" the earl gasped. "What——"

"My lord!" A man-at-arms ran up, his face white with alarm. "Some one has tampered with the winches! They will not turn! The drawbridge!"

The earl hurried into the barbican, Thomas by his side. Two men were straining at each winch in vain efforts to turn the great drums on which the drawbridge chains were wound. The drums did not move; the drawbridge still spanned the river, inviting assault.

"Bar the gates!" the earl commanded.

But Thomas thrust in between the spearmen who sprang forward to carry out the command, crying:

"One moment, my lord. There is no fault with the winches. I myself saw them turn to lower the bridge. The trouble lies outside!"

He rushed through the gate, a dozen men-at-arms at his heels. Running his eyes along the chains, Thomas saw that a massive bar of steel had been thrust through the links of each, at the point where the chains ran through their slots over the pulleys. Till those bars were removed the bridge was hopelessly down. The torches carried by his companions showed the disaster clearly.

There was but one way to remedy it; and that way was at hand. Two tree-trunks, hewn and stripped of their branches, lay one on each side of the gate. By these, unseen in the dark, Eustace's men had reached the chains as soon as the bridge was lowered. By these also Thomas and his assistants must mount to remove the bars. He lifted up one of the trunks, wondering why it should have been left there.

The next instant he learned. No need to take the trunks away; it was hopeless for the garrison to try to remove them. Three of his companions fell to the ground, and a storm of arrows thudded all about the

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portal. One, glancing off Becket's shoulder-plate, rebounded and buried itself in the neck of the man nearest him. Then the arrows ceased, and there rose the thunder of many charging hoofs.

"In!" cried Becket. "Make fast the gate!"

The men flung themselves inside the barbican; the gate clanged to behind them; and the heavy bars were shot.

Eustace had dealt his stroke swiftly and well. With the drawbridge down and the moat spanned, he could advance his troops to the very gate, and so swiftly that they would be hammering upon it before the earl could despatch enough men to the battlements to train and man the engines. Nor could the engines be used in the dark upon a swiftly moving force; they required slow, patient adjustment and a fixed target.

A brief defense could be made, with arrows and stones, from the walls; but before such missiles could do much damage to the assailants, the gate must yield to the blows that would be rained upon it. Once in possession of the barbican, Eustace could force the bailey under cover of the barbican walls, and from the bailey assail the keep itself. It was a shrewd, daring plan, well executed.

But when Thomas entered the barbican again he found the earl another man from the timid, shrinking intriguer of the afternoon. In warfare Robert of Lincoln was at home. Already he was buckling on the hauberk that a page had brought him; his commands had been rushed to bailey, guard-room and battlements. Fully six-score men had already assembled in the bailey, and were being rushed to the barbican walls as fast as their sergeants could count out the supplies of arrows for them. Others were running up, clapping on their helmets, trailing spears, adjusting their shield-straps. Eighty men in all were assembled for the first defense of the barbican gate, and swiftly the earl marshaled them before it.

Even as they fell in there came a crash that filled the barbican with its thunder. The great gate quivered and cracked.

"They use the tree-trunks for battering-rams!" Thomas cried; and the earl's command followed swiftly:

"Stand fast, all! Wat, to the walls, and bid them clear those rams away!"

An officer ran up the stair. Again and again the great trunks, impelled by many strong arms, beat upon the gate. A bar burst; two planks shivered. Silent and grim, the ranks within waited for the gate to go, and for the grim flood of points to roll in upon them.

Down the stair rushed Wat again, pale and frightened.

"My lord!" he cried. "Eustace's archers stand off in the dark, and overwhelm the battlements with volley after volley! Our men can not approach the merlons close enough to cast stones upon them who assault the gate!"

With an oath, Earl Robert hastened up the stair. Thomas, who had himself been a soldier, saw well how futile resistance must be. The earl's men would hold their ground, though the gate fell; but the barbican could not hold out against the charge of horse that would pour in over the drawbridge as soon as the gate was down. And the gate must go, since the earl's men could not show their heads above the battlements to cast stones and javelins upon those who wielded the battering-rams. Eustace's bowmen loosed their shafts unseen in the night; the very torches which must be used on the battlements to distinguish the piles of weapons, made a rare target for the hostile arrows.

The earl came down again, his eyes aglow with the flame of battle.

"I have had the torches extinguished," he said. "It will be slow work, fumbling about for missiles in the dark; but better that than to have my walls stripped bare."

A rending crash drowned the last word. Through the weakened gate ripped the butt of a tree, and a wild yell of triumph from without reechoed through the barbican. With a wrenching twist the ram disappeared again; there was a faint sound of running feet; and again the crash of wood on wood. Another plank broke from its iron bands.

"Now!" cried the earl. "Points level; shields lapped!"

The tight-lipped men-at-arms made ready for the falling of the gate, and the storm that must follow.

Something rang loud and hollow on the drawbridge; the blows of the ram ceased.

"Well cast!" Thomas cried. "Your men hold the battlements well!"

But now other arms outside snatched up the broken tree-trunk, and bore its longer section pounding down upon the gate. More

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stones crashed down from the wall; and somewhere near at hand a full, clear peal *rang* upon the night.

"Whose horn is that?" the earl cried.

The horn pealed again. Its echoes had not died when the air was filled with a sound like the buzzing of a thousand maddened bees. A yell of mingled rage and pain rose from a score of throats; outside the gate men shouted and cursed; the drawbridge rang hollow under plunging hoofs; and the voice of Eustace bellowed angry commands.

DARK as it was, Jaques and Lenoir made shift to follow Pierre's directions. They had only to follow the forest's edge to the river, cross at the ford above Swart Beck, and keep on along the brook. But following the brook was not so easy. The trees came to the very brink of the water, and in the thick darkness they could not pick their footing.

"What if 'tis but a fool's errand?" grumbled Lenoir. "A jest of Faidit's?"

"I'll warrant it no jest!" Jaques retorted. "What would he gain by a lie? We shall soon be the richer for a great treasure. Think of that, my lad."

Stumbling over stumps, lashed in the face by undergrowth, plunging into trees, falling now and again into the water in their anxiety not to lose the brook, the two men held doggedly on. But ever and again, as they stumbled over rocks or brought up headlong against some mighty bole, their mail clashed loud; and they quivered with fear lest the sound reach their own officers and so betray their desertion.

"It can not be far now," Jaques muttered. "If——"

"Nay, 'tis not far!" a mighty voice roared in their ears. "Strike a light, Sweyn, and let us look on these prowlers."

Strong hands gripped the two gold-seekers, disarmed them before they could draw and held them fast. Flint clicked on steel; a spark grew to a glow, and was fanned into flame athwart the blackness. The two, palsied by the sudden attack, stared bedazzled into the torchlight, against which heads and shoulders of armed men stood out. Lenoir became aware of a face that stared into his—a fierce face, with menacing eyes, and a bristling white beard. Then the light fell on the badge he wore.

"St. George," the bearded lips rasped. "Eustace's men! Gather fagots, lads, and make a fire!"

The forest rang with a wild hulloo; more torches were kindled, till the forest was spangled with fire. The sound of many men breaking and piling wood crackled through the night. At last a great heap of fagots stood close by the prisoners, and the terrible old man commanded:

"Spread them. Make a bed of coals!"

The torches threw their flaring light on a scene wild and fearful. A score of hands rapidly spread the wood into a long, low platform, at the corners of which little fires grew rapidly to a roaring blaze. At a fresh command the prisoners were stripped and held close to the blaze till the heat singed their skin. Vainly they struggled; vainly they cried for mercy.

"Mercy you shall have on one condition," the bearded man answered; and his voice was vibrant with menace. "Tell me what you seek here and where your master is. Speak truth, and all the truth; or when those flames sink down to coals you shall roast to ashes!"

Jaques and Lenoir sought futile counsel in each other's pallid face. The voice that menaced them was so pregnant with doom, so pitiless, that there was no hope of its owner's relenting. Nor had they the spirit to resist such a threat. Too often had they themselves inflicted the torture by fire not to know its horrors to the full. The cries of their own victims rang again in their ears. In their extremity of terror, they saw once more the writhings of helpless men and women on whom they had helped to execute the vengeance of Eustace. And just such torment awaited them unless they obeyed their captor to the uttermost.

"Mercy, mercy!" they wailed. "We will tell all!"

And they told all, with skilful prompting: first their own quest for gold, at Pierre's instigation; and now it was borne in on them with horrible certainty that the helpless old man they had expected to plunder was the very tyrant who now held them in his hands. The clatter of their stumbling progress had betrayed them to his sentinels; and, suspecting an attack from some source, he himself had come out to seize them. Their captor also understood, for he flung back his head and laughed a terrible, silent laugh.

"A rare trick, by the rood!" he cried.

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"Faidit is worthy his reputation! But what more, fellows? Your master's business here!"

The sight of the glowing coals forced an answer. Much as they feared to betray the pitiless Eustace, they feared torture more. Eustace was at a distance; the bed of flame was at their very feet.

Swiftly and fully they told how the king's son, learning from a spy in his pay that two of Duke Henry's agents were on their way to the earl, had reached Dalby before Faidit and Becket, and planned to capture them in the castle. How Pierre had ridden into their ambush; and Becket would soon be seized in the assault that was doubtless even now under way against the castle.

"——'s blood!" cried Sir Richard. "And we idle here, while the earl suffers treacherous attack! To the glade, lads!"

"And these?" an outlaw questioned.

The old man turned on the two men-at-arms.

"Were you at the burning of Paketon Tower five years since?" he questioned fiercely.

His glaring eyes forced them to speak truth; nor indeed did they know the name of him who questioned them.

"Aye, dread lord," Jaques answered. "We were. Our master there punished Richard Paketon for refusing him moneys——"

"Thank —— for this day!" the old man cried. "I am Richard Paketon! As I take vengeance now on you, I hope ere long to take deeper vengeance on your master!"

His sword gleamed in the firelight, once, twice; and they who sought gold found death.

HALF an hour later long lines of bowmen crept from the shelter of the forest into Dalby plain just below the marshy land south of the river. Their russet garb, the black night, and the fringe of willows along the stream screened them, so that they were invisible from the castle.

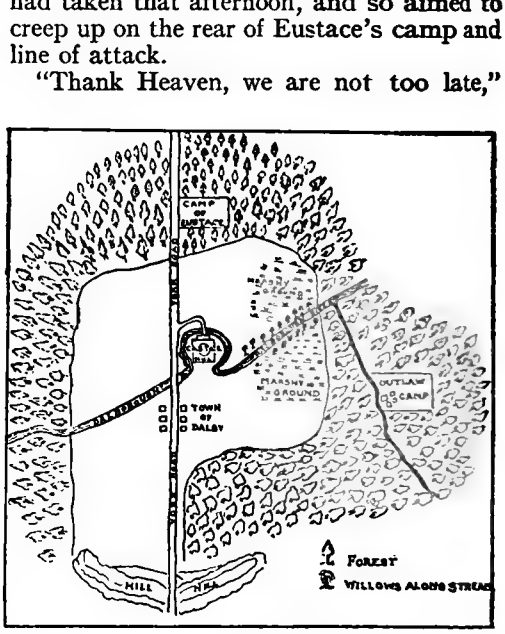
"You have your orders," Sir Richard admonished them. "Each man take his place as fast as he reaches the ground; but do not loose till ye hear my horn."

The lines of bowmen stretched out, tailed off, and scattered in the darkness. Other lines, formed in the wood, took another direction.

As soon as he had gathered his four hundred outlaws about the great fire in his camp Paketon had divided them into two companies, and given each company precise orders. With no mail to weigh them down, to catch the glimmer of the faint starlight, or to betray them with its clanking, they hastened silently to the posts their master had assigned.

One company crossed the valley between town and castle, and a little beyond the road turned north. Its orders were to take its position just west of the point where the castle road turned off the main highway, and lie flat in the dark till the signal was given them to rise. The second company, led by Sir Richard in person, sped north through the wood by the same route Pierre had taken that afternoon, and so aimed to creep up on the rear of Eustace's camp and line of attack.

"Thank Heaven, we are not too late,"



Paketon panted as he sprang into the trampled glade where Eustace had encamped. "Ha! Their trumpet even now sounds the attack!"

So it was; expecting to find Pierre and Becket in consultation with the earl when he entered the castle, Eustace had hoped to bully the earl into surrendering them at once; or otherwise, he had planned to leave soon after dark. In that case, scouts from his following were to creep up at dark, spike the drawbridge as soon as it was lowered for his departure, and so pave the way for his assault.

But failing to find his quarry, Eustace had

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delayed to hunt for them through the castle, and still further delayed to give a friendly color to his search by becoming the earl's guest at supper. Thus the efficacy of Becket's hiding-place had both forced him to assail the castle, and delayed the assault long enough for the outlaws to come up and lay a counter-ambush.

A moment after the count's trumpet came the clank of mail and the pound of hoofs swiftly eating up the distance between the plain and the drawbridge. With deeper night his horsemen had advanced to the open, formed in column under cover of dark, and made ready for the swift gallop which should bring them to the gate before the garrison could prepare adequate defense. Behind his horse came a small body of his archers, on foot. Now rang the shouts of Eustace's sergeants, relaying his commands.

"Now we must strike quickly," Paketon cried, "or my kinsman will surrender Becket to save himself! Advance, lads, and steal up to close range!"

"First set me free," a voice sounded close at hand. "And thanks for swift help!"

"Faidit!" the old man exclaimed. "Where are you? Ah!"

His groping hand found Pierre's shoulder; quickly he cut the Frenchman's bonds. Pierre strove to rise, but his limbs were cramped, and he fell to chafing them. Nor did Paketon heed him further. Slipping away, he ran after his men, who had crept so close that they could see the loom of Eustace's rear guard against the dark. His horn blared out in a wild peal.

The twanging of four hundred bows gave answer. From rear and right flank Eustace's cavalry was torn with a storm of shafts at the very moment when the castle gate reeled under the blows of the ram. His unmounted bowmen received the first fury, and melted away before the pelting arrows, leaving him no means to return volley for volley.

Then, at point-blank range—for the outlaws had been forced to come fairly upon their enemy to see the target at all—the barbed shafts tore through the rearmost horsemen, piercing mail, flesh and bone. It was Eustace's misfortune that, to cover his advance and clear the garrison from the battlements, he had had to place his bowmen where they were exposed to so undreamed-of an attack from the rear.

Himself in the van, Eustace was not even aware at first of the storm behind him. Simultaneously had come a fierce hail of arrows from the right, apparently from the road. Caught by surprize, assailed where he thought himself secure, he was for a moment seized with consternation. But the cries of his stricken men, the great gaps torn in his ranks, the plunging of wounded horses, called for action. There was but one thing to do—detach enough men to ride down the unknown bowmen who struck from the dark.

"Alain!" he cried. "Take forty men and crush the rascals!"

With splendid courage Alain obeyed. In the face of a deadly hail he brought his detachment out of column, wheeling it toward the danger that struck death into his ranks even as he executed the maneuver. Then, in a wild charge, he swept against the unseen bowmen.

But even this Paketon had foreseen, and had left orders to meet it. Scattering before the onslaught, his outlaws left a broad path for the horsemen to gallop through. Dark-clad, light-footed, they evaded the charge, reformed on both sides and poured another volley into the riders as they drove past. Meantime Paketon himself directed arrow-flight after arrow-flight into the count's disorganized rear; and now, from the panic and the outcries behind him, Eustace learned how hopelessly he was caught between the castle and his hidden foes behind.

But knowledge came too late. Now the outlaws were shooting high, so that their arrows descended in an arc and smote the troopers farther forward. The rearmost ranks were broken, striving to turn and defend themselves, smitten even as they turned; and the panic was spreading. A brisk rally, a swift attack would have cleared the outlaws away, for the moment at least; but it was no light matter to turn such a body of horse in the dark, in the face of the garrison. But this must be done, or all would be lost.

The horsemen responded desperately to Eustace's order. The rear wheeled to the left, and left again to face the storm of arrows; but so shaken were they that the next volley drove them in flight.

From the van Eustace brought the remaining ranks to left face; and on the instant Paketon ordered an advance. Running forward a few paces, his archers poured in three volleys in rapid succession just as

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Eustace got his men from column into line, to offer less of a target to the unseen foe.

It was a fatal maneuver, but Eustace had no choice. So long as he faced the gate, with his back to the hostile archers, his men were a helpless prey for the shafts that riddled them. Only by a swift, desperate charge could he crush those pestiferous archers; and till they were crushed, he could not hope to reduce the castle.

The cries of pain, the shouts of confusion, the tramping of the panic-stricken horses, made themselves heard through the battered gate. Just as Alain rode back with half his detachment slain, and blundered against the rear of his own pivoting comrades, the earl caught the meaning of the turmoil.

"A rescue!" he cried. "They break! Open the gate for a sally!"

Quickly the bars were raised, and the shattered gate flung wide. Already formed to resist storm, the garrison poured out from the barbican on to the bridge, swept across, and struck their foe on what had been his front, but was now his flank. Plying their weapons with all the zeal of men who strike for life and for vengeance, they rolled up the frightened horsemen, enveloped their lines for a third their length, and struck them from their horses.

Now the outlaws whom Alain had pursued rallied, and drove a fresh volley into Eustace's rear. Paketon too kept his company at their work, so that the milling horsemen of Eustace were fighting a hopeless fight on three sides. Only the front was free, for Eustace could not get his ranks to finish their evolution in the teeth of the garrison's sally. The end had come, and Eustace was forced to recognize defeat.

"*Sauve qui peut!*" he cried. "Flee! Flee!"

Eastward across the plain his horsemen fled, desperately plying the spur. But their torment had not ceased; for in the black night they came suddenly full into a maze of mud and reeds and water.

Their wild gallop carried them deep into the marsh before they could rein in; and when the bog stopped them, men and beasts floundered, sank, or were stuck fast. And to the very edge of the marsh the pitiless bowmen pursued them, though now the fewer numbers of the horsemen offered a poor target in the night.

But one man did not think of seeking safety so soon. The Captain Alain, frenzied with defeat and thinking only of how he might in some measure retrieve a little from the disaster, rode straight south from the castle into the wood. A few shafts sped after him; but most of Paketon's men were harassing the main retreat, and a single horseman at night is hard to hit. Past them Alain tore, through the forest fringe and the glade where he had encamped earlier, to the spot where he had left Pierre.

But Pierre no longer lay there bound. He was not to be seen. Alain broke into wild curses, lashing out with his sword in the dark. Or rather, with Pierre's sword; for the splendid weapon had seemed so sure a talisman of success that he had cast his own aside.

Suddenly a great weight seemed to fall upon his head; his senses reeled, and he slithered from the saddle. Over his body stooped Pierre, an oaken fagot in his hand. Casting the rough weapon aside, Pierre tore the sword from Alain's hand, felt the jewels in its hilt, and laughed aloud.

"My sword, my sword!" he cried exultantly. "And I have struck one blow at least this night!"

Leaving the officer where he lay, Pierre ran toward the castle.

THE earl's men trooped back into the castle, laughing and shouting for joy of victory. With the last came the earl, by no means so exultant. He had won, had saved castle and life; but he had made a lasting enemy of Eustace. And Eustace, mounted on a splendid horse, had escaped. Slowly and thoughtfully Earl Robert crossed the drawbridge, and entered the torch-lit barbican.

Becket strode after him, helmetless and flushed, with bloody sword. He was about to speak; but a voice from the drawbridge hailed him:

"Ho! Thomas!"

"Pierre!" cried Becket. "Where have you been? What——"

"With Eustace's men, bound," Pierre answered. "More shame to me, I have been within arrow-flight of a good fight, and my sword has not drawn blood."

A rough laugh sounded behind them. There, in the very gateway, stood Sir Richard Paketon with a handful of russet-clad archers. But the earl had turned too, and

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at sight of his outlawed kinsman he started in astonishment.

"So it is you, you and your outcasts, Richard, who have saved me!" he cried.

Paketon's eyes glowed.

"Some little work we have done tonight," he answered. "But he who saved you is Pierre Faidit there. The count's captive, he contrived to send the count's own men to bring me news of your plight. He has not merely saved your walls and your life, brother; he saved your honor. After this night's work you can no longer hold aloof from England's cause, no longer hesitate between Stephen, the Fox, and Henry, the Lion—Pierre Faidit has driven you into Henry's arms. But for him, I should not have come, and you would have been Stephen's captive. Now you are Henry's man!"

Paketon spoke the very thought that had been vexing the earl.

"Aye," Robert admitted. "I was at peace, untroubled, and now I must be plagued with Henry's battles!"

Becket broke in eagerly:

"But now, my lord, you will win Henry's favor, and a noble name. You will bring all the North to Duke Henry, and with the North he will win his crown!"

The earl stared from one to another of the three men who had forced his hand and at last he smiled wryly.

"So be it," he said. "Since I am now Henry's man perforce, why—long live Henry, King of England!"

And his men-at-arms, who had watched in half-comprehending wonder, cried aloud after him—

"Long live Henry, England's king!"

NIGER WITCHES

***by* Thomas Samson Miller**

TO HEAR the cry of witchcraft raised in a Niger village and then see the cold terror that grips the people is to experience a nightmare horror that is never forgotten. Fear simply dehumanizes the natives; atrocious, unbelievable the mad cruelty with which the whole village will hound a suspect—even the person's own relatives.

Perhaps too, every man and woman is glad to hound to death the suspect because it diverts suspicion from themselves. Wo betide the mother of twins, the palsied old crone, the person whose ways are the least bit unusual or mysterious—the herbalist, the mal-formed, the six-toed.

There are two ways of bewitching: (a) Witching something out of a man; (b) witching something into a man. Say a man is taken sick. He affirms he has been bewitched. The wizard takes charge.

He has two ways of discovering the guilty party:

(1) By carrying a wicker basket, the lid of which flies up when the witch is approached; (2) he gently grinds his palms together, walking through the village, until he comes to the hut of the guilty one, when his hands fly apart and the palms refuse to meet. Whether this is the result of his subconscious mind or whether he has selected his victim is a question that it is impossible to answer.

The suspect must confess or be tortured. Generally he claims trial by ordeal with little or no prospect of acquittal. In fact, to be suspected of witchcraft is enough. He is doomed. The whole village goes mad with fear. The witch is killed, without shedding of blood, and elaborate precautions are taken to capture his spirit in a charm and hold it there secure from doing further mischief.

And does the victim himself believe he is a witch? He does not question the verdict of the basket-lid or the palms that refused to meet. The spirits have bested him. A witch has obsessed him. Personally he is not to blame, but he does not dispute the justice or the injustice of it. It is Fate.

Such is witchcraft in West Africa. But lest we wonder too greatly let us bear in mind that but a few years ago in Ireland several peasants were tried for murdering an old woman by roasting her alive over a stove, to "burn the witch out of her."

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Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

THIS is where I make myself very unpopular. You ought to know by this time that I have sincere respect and admiration for the old-timers of the West. They played a necessary part in the nation's development and played it, for the most part, manfully. Against the very earliest of them I have nothing to say, but the old-timers who followed the first scouts were in many cases not only builders, but destroyers, devastators, ruiners, often too selfish and greedy to think of anything except what they could "get out of it" for themselves.

A forest meant nothing to them except money to be got from timber. So they cut down the trees, generally not to clear land for agriculture but just for money for lumber. They were too ignorant or too selfish to weigh the fact that they were cutting down the soil-supply of crop-growing water and increasing the waste and destruction of floods, or the fact that, for present selfish gains from lumber, they were destroying a bank instead of merely drawing upon it. The science of forestry, of getting much money from trees instead of one small and final handful, was beyond their ken.

Even to this day Westerners in general haven't had sense enough to replace by planting young trees. They are content to boast, instead, over the wholesaleness of their destruction. As between West and East, I'm for the West, but this tree-planting point is one of many on which the

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East shows to somewhat better advantage. A Westerner is likely to laugh at the idea of planting trees for reforestation. "Huh! We've got plenty to live on without that." The same old, selfish heedlessness of the future, the same old ignorance and moss-grown prejudice. For the Westerner, while more progressive in many things than the Easterner, is, on many other things, far more moss-grown, pig-headed and reactionary.

Forests are only one item in his list of wanton, greedy, ignorant destruction. If the cattleman could make more money from cattle by holding back the flood of settlers, he held it back. The sheepman didn't hesitate to sacrifice all other interests to money for himself from sheep. The farmer drained the soil's fertility on the principle of take everything, give nothing. For results, compare the actual yield per acre of the West's best farm-lands now with the actual yield of the "worn-out" acres of effete Europe under cultivation for centuries. Westerner, the next time you boast about your crops out there, think it over and hang your head. Your *land* is wonderful, but you've been stupid in handling it.

The Easterner, too, has wasted natural resources, but at least he is not boasting about it. The West speaks with childish pride of its exterminating the bison, but the East doesn't boast of its almost exterminating the wild turkey. And the East has begun to wake up to the idea of conserving and restocking. The East has had more time to realize its sins and blunders, but then the West boasts, too, about its wide-awake and superior progressiveness, so, by its own account, it ought to be on at least an equal footing—more youthful but quicker.

THAT'S all. I'm still for the West and the old-timers of the West, but the West isn't what you'd call slow to talk about itself and it needs to be reminded that it has also a whole lot to blush about. It scorns the conservatism of the East, but when it comes to an idea not in the Westerner's own customary line of thinking it's sometimes harder to get it into his head than into an Easterner's.

You Westerners like straight talk, so I'm talking that way to you pioneers, builders and leaders, you destroyers, ruiners, wasters and devastators who sometimes haven't sense enough to follow a blazed trail. And I don't know but that I'll have to take back that word "builders" so far as the present generation is concerned. Just *what* are you building—what that is big when measured by world standards instead of local standards? And *who* is building it? Born Westerners, or Easterners who have brought with them the building habit?

Before you boast any more about the great and glorious West, pause to consider that you were given some of the richest territory in the world to draw on and that almost any fool can make good if you give him a bank to live in. But has the bank grown richer, or poorer, under your care? Have you been a builder or a spendthrift? Boast about your rich country, if you like, but what have *you* to boast about that is worth boasting about? At least stop boasting about your brazen guilt and stupid ignorance in wasting and destroying what was given into your hands.

It may not sound like it, but it's a friend talking.

TWO phases of the wild horse question are interesting Camp-Fire. One, Are there still wild horses in any number in the West? Two, What is the origin of the American wild horse? The first has been discussed at another Camp-Fire. Here are some letters on the second:

Seattle, Wash.

"Is it not possible," writes Mr. George C. Lyon in the Camp-Fire for June 3rd, "that horses did exist on the American continent, or in the northern parts of it, independently previous to their introduction by Europeans?"

SIR WILLIAM FLOWER thought it possible—"in some parts of the continent remote from that which was first visited by the Spaniards, where they were certainly unknown." Fossil remains show that the horse was numerous in North America in Pleistocene times. The teeth of some of these old horses are so like those of the animal of today that, unless bones too are found, it is sometimes impossible for the scientist to determine whether the creature in question is fossil or modern. Professor Cope thought "it almost seemed as if the horse *might* have lingered in Texas until the coming of the white man."

THIS is not very clinching certainly; but it does show what a puzzling thing the extinction of the New World animal really is. In 1530 Cabot saw horses in La Plata: as this was but thirty-eight years after Columbus landed on San Salvador, it has been suggested that these animals could not have been *European*.

The first European horses to set hoof on the mainland of North America were those of Cortes—sixteen horses and five mares. That was in 1519.

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In 1541 Coronado was out on the great buffalo plains, and never a horse (save, of course, those of the expedition) did Coronado see. Poor Lo, as Coronado saw him, had no better beast of burden than a dog.

THOSE who believe that the horse might have existed in certain "remote parts" of this continent at the time of its discovery will, I fancy, be hard put to answer this:

Why, then, did the Indian leave this magnificent animal in unmolested freedom and content himself with the dog (and in South America the llama) as a pack-animal? Why did he prefer to travel over hill and dale on foot to making the journey on horseback? Had the horse existed, certainly the Indian would not have been ignorant of the animal's existence; for what place was there that the Indian did not know? And who is there bold enough to say, or even suggest, that—of course, poor Lo knew the horse was there, but he didn't have sense enough to catch him?

There are two things to be adduced in favor of the theory that the horse might have existed somewhere in the New World at the coming of Columbus: the abundance and remarkably fine condition of the remains, and the extraordinary numbers that were to be found shortly after the advent of the whites. There is, however, nothing to show that the horse and man ever were contemporaneous in the New World. No one ever has discovered the remains of the horse associated in any way with Indian relics antecedent to the days of Columbus. Yet, as we have seen, the animal was abundant in North America in Pleistocene times—not so very long ago, as time is counted by the geologist. What caused the extinction of the animal in the New World is one of those enigmas with which Nature so delights to puzzle the scientist. But its extinction is no more to be wondered at, perhaps, than that of the mastodon, the mammoth, the rhinoceros, the camel, or *Bison latifrons*—"perhaps," says Frederic A. Lucas of the last mentioned, "the most superb of the ox tribe."

IF ANYTHING in New World history is certain, it is that, on the morning of that fateful day which brought the conquistador, neither Aztec nor Peruvian ever had seen a horse. Among the conquerors themselves, of horses there was very little buying or selling: the animal was too valuable. It may be of interest to note that, what with the scarcity of iron, Hernando Pizarro "shod all his cavalry horses with silver—except a few that he shod with gold." In strong contrast to the scarcity and great value of the horse in the days of the Conquest is the fact that, a hundred years later, Orvalle saw war-horses sold in Chile at two dollars a head!

Mr. Lyon thinks the Indian's excellent horsemanship is to be wondered at—if the Indian never saw a horse until the white man rode into the scene. It seems to me, however, that there is nothing in this to cause wonder; for look at our excellent auto-drivers and bird-men!

Apropos of *wild* horses, the following—which I take from Frederic A. Lucas's "Animals of the Past"—will probably be news to some readers:

"It is also a curious fact that within historic times there have been no wild horses, in the true sense of the word, unless indeed those found on the steppes north of the Sea of Azof be wild, and this is very doubtful."

In other words, the ancestry of every single wild horse, so called, goes back to some animal *held in domestication by man*. Have we here the explanation of the survival of the horse in the Old World and his extinction in the New? It seems to me that it is by no means a far-fetched suggestion. Man had not made his appearance in America, and so *here* the horse was left to succumb to those influences from which, in the Old World, he was saved by the hand of his biped master.

AS TO the nature of those influences that in America brought the equine race to an end and would have done the same thing in the Old World had it not been for man's protecting hand—no information whatever is to be had on questions such as this. *Why* races of animals come into existence, thrive and multiply, then diminish in numbers and suffer extinction is one of the many unsolvable mysteries. Who can name those factors that contributed to the extraordinary increase and spread of the English sparrow in this country? Its numbers are kept down in England; why do we not see the same thing here? Nobody can tell us. Who, looking at a red clover would dream that the bumblebee had anything to do with the plant's scarcity or abundance? Yet such indeed is the fact. Where there are no bumblebees, there you shall find no red clover.

I intended to dwell briefly on the fossil horses—*Pliohippus*, which lived in the Pliocene; *Hippotherium* and *Mesohippus*, they with the three toes; and the little four-toed *Hyracotherium;* but this letter has, I fear, already exceeded desirable limits.

The horse traces his pedigree back to *Hyracotherium*, which lived in that remote period called by the geologist the Eocene—back only some two or three or four millions of years! It may be of interest to note, by the way, that this period which gives us the equine Adam gives us also the first snakes.—ROBIN CRUISER.

Pittsfield, Mass.

I have seen the broomtails and slickears of Idaho and of Nevada and New Mexico. Seen them galloping free and wild and also captured by running or pit traps. Generally they are not worth the capturing. Occasionally there is a magnificent specimen, usually the stallion of the herd, who is literally the survival of the fittest. Nearly always they are small. They have fine legs with springy pasterns; they are great climbers. Oftenest they have their home in wild country and seldom show on the plains.

I HAVE never seen nor heard anything that can substantiate the theory that they were an indigenous animal or anything but the often degenerated descendants of Spanish barbs. Indian petroglyphs antedating Spanish invasion do not show them with the representation of other contemporary animals. They are a long, long way from little *eohippus* of the Eocene and the chain does not establish *equus* as having been evolved on this continent. I wish it did for the sheer romance of it if nothing else.

It is only natural that wild horses should develop speed but *they*—none of them—have the stamina of the ranch-horse when the latter gets a feed or two of grain once in a while.

As to the riding qualities of the Indians on short acquaintance—that means absolutely nothing.

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ıe Hawaiians, to whom the horse is much more odern than the Indians, are magnificent riders. ne of them held—still holds perhaps—the hog- ing record. They are the most skilful and fearless cowboys on Hawaiian ranches and the native lo teams have pushed all their opponents closely r honors. It does not take many generations to ake a horseman.

Wish I could think differently about the mustang, ronco or cayuse. (The last name, by the way, is o often used to suggest a miserable specimen hereas it is a true Indian term for horse.) I used) try and kid myself that the broomtail was a truly estern product but all signs failed and the scien- sts, admittedly vague as to the original habitat of *ıus*, deny the theory positively.—J. ALLAN DUNN.

Hempstead, L. I.

The fossils of prehistoric horses have been dug ıp in North America. These horses were very mall animals about the size of a greyhound and ıad disappeared long before the coming of the ›paniards.

FROM Spain Cortes brought the first horses (of present day size) ever landed on North America, ›n March 24, 1519; at the time of his conquest of Mexico. Some of these horses escaped and roamed north. Unmolested, they multiplied in great numbers and spread over the entire western part of the continent. A percentage of these horses were of Arabian blood. There are still small bands of wild horses in the West but are mostly confined to Arizona and New Mexico; these horses show the Arabian characteristics distinctly.

Mr. Lyon's question how the Indians of North America became such good riders if they did not know the horse until introduced by the Europeans is easily solved. The horse, as said before, was introduced in 1519; and not until two centuries later were the Indians west of the Mississippi known to exist. It is easily imagined that any race having in their country an animal as valuable as the horse would not lose much time domesticating it for their use.—EDWARD WILLARD.

Lakewood, Ohio.

I quote you the following, from the May, 1921, issue of *Asia* Magazine, from an article by Mr. Roy Chapman Andrews:

"Under the able direction of Prof. Henry Fairfield Osborn, the distinguished president of the American Museum of Natural History, the greatest collection of fossil horses in the world has been brought together in the Museum. We have so detailed a record that the complete evolution of the horse, from the tiny five-toed, forest-living, cretaceous ancestor, now for long centuries extinct, to the famous Man o' War, the most perfect living horse, is there for all to trace.

"THE horse, we know, originated in *Wyoming* and adjacent parts of the West. At first he was a shy and retiring creature, no larger than a terrier, with five toes on feet adapted to soft, springy ground of the forests. As the wooded area began to decrease in extent, the horse perforce changed his habits, becoming more and more a plains living animal dependent upon speed to protect him from enemies. Since his five-toed feet were not adapted to running on hard ground, the middle toe gradually developed the hoof, and the side digits disappeared, except for the so-called 'splint-bones' in horses we know today.

"From their early American home horses spread over all the world, but during the glacial period they were entirely exterminated in America. Curiously enough, they were brought back to us by the Spaniards. Our own Indians had no horses until they captured some that had escaped from the European invaders.

"The *camel* is another animal that, although it originated in America, was entirely exterminated here and, with the exception of the llamas of South America, is today found only in Asia and Africa. The earliest camels—small animals no larger than sheep—were found in Wyoming."

I trust the above will answer clearly the question asked.—C. A. DEAS, JR.

The clipping comrade Stevenson mentions below is a condensation of the article from *Asia* quoted in comrade Deas' letter.

Urbana, Illinois.

Immediately after reading Comrade Lyon's inquiry I picked up the Chicago *Tribune* of May 8th, and ran across the clipping herewith enclosed.

Being then interested in the subject myself, and not believing everything I read in the daily papers, I began to dig into the matter, and found that a man will have to take a week off if he wants to read and digest everything that is printed about the horse, his early history, habits, etc.

Among the more important things I read, were the following:

In "The Voyage of The Beagle," Darwin, among other fossil remains, found "In the Pampean deposit at Bajada . . . one tooth of a horse in the same stained and decayed state. This latter tooth greatly interested me (see foot-note) and I took scrupulous care in ascertaining that it had been embedded contemporaneously with the other remains; . . . nor was it then known with certainty that the remains of horses are common in North America. . . . Certainly it is a marvelous fact in the history of the Mammalia, that in South America a native horse should have lived and disappeared, to be succeeded in after ages by the countless herds descended from the few introduced with the Spanish colonists."

The foot-note referred to above reads, "I need hardly state here that there is good evidence against any horse living in America at the time of Columbus."

DARWIN, in his "Origin of Species," also says, "With respect to horses, from reasons which I can not give here, I am doubtfully inclined to believe, in opposition to several authors, that all the races belong to the same species." Farther on in his text, he says, "For myself, I venture to confidently look back thousands on thousands of generations and I see an animal striped like a zebra, but perhaps otherwise very differently constructed, the common parents of our domestic horse (whether or not it be descended from one or more wild stocks), of the ass, the hemionus, the quagga, and zebra."

Among the rest, Winston's "Encyclopedia" gives this: "Horse (*Equus Caballus*), a well-known quadruped belonging to the family *Equidæ*, order *Ungulata* (hoofed animals), and subdivision *Peris-*

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sodactyla (odd-toed); characterized by an undivided hoof formed by the third toe and its enlarged horny nail. . . . The family includes also the asses and zebras, and original types appear to have been at one time common in both the Old World and the American continent. No horses existed in America when it was discovered by Columbus, those now found in a wild state there being descendants of those introduced by the Spaniards. . . . The descent of the present horse can be traced through several fossil forms back to an animal about the size of a fox, and having four separate digits or toes on the feet."

THE horse has not only been the servant of man in developing his material resources, etc., but has also been an object of worship. Among the ancient Teutonic and what are now the Scandinavian peoples, the horse, and more especially the white horse, was held to be the direct earthly representative of the gods. Witness the following from "Tacitus on Germany," written about 69 or 70 A. D. Tacitus, speaking of the sacred groves of these peoples, says, "But this nation, it is peculiar to learn, divine presages and admonitions from horses also. These are nourished by the State in the same sacred woods and groves, all milk white and employed in no earthly labour. . . . nor in any sort of augury is more faith and assurance reposed, not by the populace only, but even by the nobles, even by the Priests. These account themselves the ministers of the Gods and the horses privy to his will."

They also seem to have been the most prized possession of these people, for in the same work, Tacitus says, "Horses are by the father bequeathed as a part of his household and family, horses are conveyed amongst the rights of succession, and as such the son receives them; but not the eldest son like other effects, by priority of birth, but he who happens to be signal in boldness and superior in war."

Since reading all of the above, and a lot more that I am not giving you, I do not doubt that at one time the horse was about the size of a small dog, striped like a zebra, and had four or five toes on each foot (and maybe webs between the toes); but you can't get away from the fact that the horse has existed in his present shape and form for a heck of a long while.

READ the following from the Book of Job, written between the seventh and fourth centuries before Christ (authorities differ as to the exact time).

Jehovah, speaking to Job from the whirlwind, says:

"Hast thou given the horse his might? Hast thou clothed his neck with the shaking mane? Hast thou made him to leap as the locust? The glory of his snorting is terrible. He paweth in the valley, and rejoiceth in his strength; he goeth out to meet the armed men. He mocketh at fear and is not dismayed; neither turneth he back from the sword. The quiver rattleth against him, the flashing spear and the javelin. He swalloweth the ground with fierceness and rage; neither believeth he that it is the voice of the trumpet. And oft as the trumpet soundeth he saith, Aha! And he smelleth the battle afar off, the thunder of the captains, and the shouting."

If Comrade Lyon can't pick out what he wants to know about the horse from any of the above, I will refer him to his nearest public library and advise him to arrange for a leave of absence from his present vocation if he wants to read all that library has regarding the horse. If I have given him what he wants to know, I will be glad to have been of service to him, as it has been a great adventure for me to read "The Voyage of The Beagle" and "Tacitus on Germany," and believe me, for adventures, Darwin has most of the present day writers backed off the map. And that's that.—GEO. T. STEVENSON.

IT WAS suggested by two of our writers' brigade, E. O. Foster and Paul L. Anderson, each independently of the other, that some action be taken among us to express not only our sadness over the death of F. St. Mars but our admiration of a life bravely lived and of the work done during that brave life. A memorial tablet was suggested, to be placed on the wall of our magazine's home and brought into being by voluntary contributions from his fellows of our writers' brigade.

I am very heartily in sympathy with that plan—a tablet erected by men, no one of whom, so far as I know, has ever met him, but who seem somehow to have come to know the man through his work and to feel drawn toward this very human chronicler of nature's wild. But why should we not broaden the plan to include those others of our writers' brigade who have slipped away from us, outward bound on the Long Trail that has no turning? Henry Oyen, Harry Couzens, Louis Becke, Capt. George B. Boynton, Thomas F. Byron, Richard Marsh, Clinton H. Stagg, Ira South and others.

Why should there not be a tablet to take the names of all in visible evidence of our not forgetting those who have talked to us at our Camp-Fire and now talk no more? May new names be slowly added, but when the time comes there should be a place for them.

I SUGGEST such a tablet, to be erected by contributions not only from our writers' brigade but from all of us of Camp-Fire who wish to join in this testimonial of comradeship. If you see with me in this, send in your mite. It is not the amount of the contribution that matters, but the friendship and the number of those who give. Send a penny, a nickel, a dime—no one person need send more. It is the sending that counts, not the amount sent. Even a stamp will do.

Naturally the list of contributors is likely to be too long to publish and I can not even

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gage to acknowledge receipt, but if you'll ıst me I'll account to you for the total d, with help from those of our writers' igade living near and from the rest of us the office, will arrange for a tablet of itable quality, design and inscription. ıggestions from any of you, particularly to the inscription, will be welcomed, and ıy of you near enough the office are more an welcome to join the informal com- ittee that will have the matter in hand. there is any surplus after a suitable tablet ıs been erected, it can be used for some her good purpose and suggestions are in. der. It may be, for example, that the milies of some of these dead comrades are ard put to it and if we can not give to the ead, we can give to those near to them.

Will you send your mite?

SOMEWHERE in Camp-Fire's cache are more letters on the use of guns as clubs, ut here is the only one I can lay my hands n at present:

Ft. Worth, Texas.

I desire to call your attention to errors that are ɔmmon to most writers—and, I may add, my favor- es—in describing the use of the revolver as a club. (should say the misuse.) No one familiar with the se of a revolver would ever strike with the butt, olding to the barrel, for the following reasons:

First: The Colt .45 held by the butt is almost a eadly weapon in the hands of an ordinary man hen used as a club. I have seen a scalp laid open o the skull with a very ordinary blow of this nature. ven the lighter variety of revolver is a formidable veapon when used as a club in this manner.

Second: When used with hold on barrel you are urning the business end of the gun on yourself, it the same time subjecting the gun to a violent con- ussion.

Third: You place yourself in a position in which, nless your victim is unsuspecting, he could disarm ou with ease if he could seize the revolver before he blow was delivered.

Fourth: If you had more than one adversary you would have to reverse the revolver before you would be in a business position.

I picked these ideas up forty years ago in New Mexico, Arizona, west Texas, and Mexico. I never used a gun as a club or shot any one but I have seen both and the rules mentioned herein were strictly adhered to.— —— ——.

AT PAST Camp-Fires I've presented the program of the American Society because I see the bitter need of any and every organization having those general aims. My objection to their excluding foreign-born citizens who have proved themselves real Americans was met by the argument that this exclusion was necessary until the Society had become more firmly established.

I joined the Society and agreed to serve on the board of directors, believing it my duty as an American to give any such movement the benefit of any doubts rather than to hold back and let others do the work while it is getting on its feet.

I still believe in the general aims of the American Society, but, having presented to you their case, I feel in honor bound to state to you that I am no longer on their board and have resigned my membership. I have done this only because I feel that they are attempting a big program with too much speed, and I wish to make it very clear that I do not question their entire sincerity and earnestness. As you know, I have had my own experience in launching this kind of organization and learned that even a more conservative program, laid out after a good many years of careful study, can not be put into effect unless there are back of it quite a few citizens who can give to it most of their time and who can begin with a fund of very considerable proportions. In short, I believe that such an attempt as that of the Amercan Society is entirely possible of success, now that people are far more awake to the need than at the time of my attempt, but personally I feel that such an attempt must move very slowly until it has passed the initial stages. My judgment on this point may be a mistaken one, but I feel bound to state it to you.

SO MUCH for the American Society. As to the acute need of such organizations there can be no doubt. But there seem to me two separate needs. First, in the face of powerful organizations of foreign-born American citizens devoted in most cases primarily to the interests of members as former citizens of their respective native lands rather than as Americans who have severed all allegiance to any other country whatsoever, there is need of an organization of native-born Americans to preserve the necessary balance. Particularly as there is now on foot a movement to unite all such organizations into a political party to control our national affairs in the interests of the foreign-born and therefore at the expense of the American-born and of America itself.

Second, and even more important, there is need to unite into a practical working body all Americans, irrespective of where born, who sincerely have at heart the

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essential principles upon which our democracy is founded. Such an organization can rear no enduring structure that does not rest solidly and altogether upon the elemental and fundamental work of educating Americans into the theory and practise of the principle that a democracy's success and even its continued existence are absolutely dependent upon its *individual citizens'* clear understanding of essential democracy, upon their loyalty to those principles in all circumstances, and upon their active participation in public affairs. At present that understanding, that loyalty and that participation are all sadly lacking. Most of our troubles as a people are due to that lack. There is no possible permanent remedy for that lack except organized, systematic, wholesale, practical education in the personal duties of individual citizens to the democracy *that is themselves.*

YOU can lay out what programs you please, institute any reforms, pass any laws, raise any structures you like, change our very form of government to any other form, but none of all this can be sound or endure unless it is built upon an *individual* citizenship that is sound and endures.

Two specific points for education are these:

(1) Education of Americans to the understanding that graft in or upon public office *can* be nothing but treason, is a more serious injury to the people than is burglary, arson or murder, and calls for the fullest penalty of the law. You may turn your back upon this fact, but you can not demolish it. To execute a citizen for betrayal of public office may seem outlandish to you, but you can not base your objection on either logic or common sense so long as the death penalty is enforced for any other crime and *so long as you continue the world-old custom of executing citizens for exactly this same offense in war-time.* Disloyalty is disloyalty, treason is treason and a traitor is a traitor no matter whether a country be at peace or at war.

This country is full of traitors who do not realize they are traitors. They are everywhere among us, from Congress down to your own neighborhood. Most of them, if given clear knowledge of what they are and faced by that same knowledge in the people, would not be traitors. Their habitual treason is no more their fault than it is yours or mine. If you do not teach your child indvidual morals do you expect him to have individual morals? If you do not teach your child civic morals do you expect him to have civic morals?

(2) Jealous protection of the rights of free speech and public assemblage. On every hand and on every possible excuse these rights are being encroached upon and limited. They are the very heart and essence of democracy. To the degree that they are limited, democracy is killed.

THERE is only one teaching that should be enforced:

Our present form of government is that agreed upon by the majority of Americans. If you don't want to live under it, get out. If you want to live here but change the form of government, you should be free to work for the form you desire and to get others to work for that form. But while you work for it you must keep the laws of the present form which is now the will of the majority and the benefits of which you now accept. By free speech and any other lawful means you please, bring the majority to adopt the new form, but until then you must be loyal to the form the majority now chooses.

Any -ism that tries to force itself upon our democracy by means unlawful to our democracy becomes thereby a common enemy. But any -ism in the world has the right, under real democracy, to plead its cause by lawful means openly and without hindrance. If the citizens of a democracy are allowed to advance or listen to only those opinions and theories that some one thinks are good for them, what becomes of democracy? Further, I believe in the essentials of our present form of government, but if it can not withstand the presentation of other theories of government that it is because the present form is no longer the will of the majority and therefore, by its own essential terms, no longer has a right to exist. I believe our present form, being in fundamentals the expression of our genius as a people, can withstand the assaults of all the -isms—unless we give them added power by undemocratically trying to deny them fair hearing and unless we continue to fail to counteract them by teaching our citizens the nature of the democracy they now live under but very vaguely understand. And if we suppress and fail to teach then we are no longer fit to live under our present form and will assuredly ruin the

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ext form for exactly that same reason. ou can not build any sound house out of otten brick.

WHAT is needed now is an organization to collect into a working body all mericans who have real Americanism at eart. Give the members no propaganda cept the essentials of our present democ- icy, with the emphasis placed upon the bligations of the individual citizen. De- and nothing of them except the practise id spreading of these essentials. As they ow in numbers, organize them into State, unty, city and ward units, giving each iit the utmost freedom of action possible id coordinating them only along the lines the fundamental principles. Above all, ake the organization itself a democracy, ith as little emphasis as may be upon its ficers. You have in this both the educa- ve force needed and the force necessary to ive its way at the polls. *Its* way, not its ficers' way.

There are many organizations aiming at rious phases of civic betterment. The ms of very few are fundamental or com- ehensive. There is practically no coordi- ition or cooperation among them. Here e the makings of a general organization hose power for good would be almost oundless. In its way stand petty jealousies id personal ambitions—and the lack of e right men and women to set about iiting all these bodies in spite of jealousies id ambitions, leaving to each its individual ork but joining all in the common founda- on work upon which the work of each is terly dependent.

HERE is the needed work. Are there no Americans among you who will dedi- te yourselves to it? I've already given e best of my spare time, my health and my ospects of personal advancement to this ork and just now I have no more to give. e there none among you to give your- lves in turn? There will be no glory or ofit in it, quite likely others will get the edit for what is accomplished and quite ssibly you will get carelessly crucified in e end by way of reward. But, well, you'd to war to save your country, wouldn't u, with no greater prospect of profit for urself?

I can't close without purging my soul of little spot of bitterness that's festered in it for years. I'm eligible to the Sons of the American Revolution, the Sons of Colonial Wars and perhaps other organizations of the kind, on both sides of my house if I remember aright. At least others of my family on both sides belong to some of them. But I've never applied for membership. To put my reasons briefly, these organizations should, by their nature, be fighting in the forefront of battle for the things most essential to the present and future welfare of our country. Instead of this, generally speaking, they devote what energies they have—such remaining energies as are not devoted to ridiculous squabbles over who shall be officers—to commemorating what their dead ancestors did and "Keeping alive the spirit of etc." You can't keep alive the spirit etc. solely by reading papers about corpses and putting up tablets to commemorate what somebody else did. The only way you can really keep alive the spirit etc. is by giving yourselves as the spirit etc. prompted your ancestors to give themselves.

Such organizations as these could be a tremendous force for real and practical patriotism. By the obligation of the very tradition and blood they worship they should have their sleeves rolled up to the elbow and be leading the fight against the muck and rottenness that are today the Republic's most dangerous enemies. And, instead, what *are* they doing?

WHAT America needs is not ancestor worshipers but men and women fit to be ancestors themselves. Of what value is good blood if it has turned to water or cologne? Of what good to America is Americanism that can not operate this side of 1812? We need men-patriots, not eunuch-patriots, women citizens, not dames, workers, not social deposits, Americans who do and give, not rarefied beings whose only credit as Americans comes to them second-hand from ghosts. You who are so proud of your American lineage, aren't you sufficiently American and sufficiently intelligent and sufficiently well-bred to realize that good blood is an obligation, not a boast, and that the proof of good blood lies in your own actions, not in a printed page from a genealogy?

There are in these societies many real Americans who live up to their own obligations as Americans. Are there not enough of them to make these societies worthy of their own high traditions?—A. S. H.

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These services of *Adventure* are free to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we offer them gladly and ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules,** thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

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Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied. Unclaimed mail which we have held for a long period is listed on the last page of the last issue of each month.

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Our free service department "Lost Trails" in the pages following, though frequently used in cases where detective agencies, newspapers, and all other methods have failed, or for finding people long since dead, has located a very high percentage of those inquired for. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

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The Boston Magazine Exchange, 109 Mountfort St., Boston, Mass., can supply Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL SELL: Last twelve numbers, except Mid-Nov., 1919; all of 1921, except May; all of 1922. Best offer including postage—Address V. G. FREEMAN, 1953 North 25th St., Siante, Wash.

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When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month.

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To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

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General Questions from Readers

In addition to our free service department "Ask Adventure" on the pages following, *Adventure* can sometimes answer other questions within our general field. When it can, it will. Expeditions and employment excepted.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Assn. of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

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Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualifications and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1
BERIAH BROWN, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. ★ The Sea Part 2
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

3. ★ Islands and Coasts
CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE, Hamilton, Bermuda. Islands of Indian and Atlantic oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits. Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

4. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1
TOM L. MILLS, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. New Zealand, Cook Islands, Samoa. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage 8 cents.*)

5. South Sea Islands Part 2
CHARLES BROWN, JR., 213 E St., San Rafael, Calif. French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn). Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

6. ★ Australia and Tasmania
ALBERT GOLDIE, Sydney Press Club, 51 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage 5 cents.*)

7. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
FAY-COOPER COLE, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

8. New Guinea
DR. ALBERT BUELL LEWIS, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

9. Philippine Islands
BUCK CONNOR, P. O. Box 202, Hollywood, Calif. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

10. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. HALTON, 714 Marquette Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

11. Japan
GRACE P. T. KNUDSON, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

12. Asia, Southern
CAPTAIN BEVERLEY GIDDINGS, 1315 Josephine St., New Orleans, La. Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, western China, Borneo. Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

13. Africa Part 1
THOMAS S. MILLER, Carmel, Monterey Co., Calif. Gold, Ivory and Fever Coasts of West Africa, Niger River to Jebba, northern Nigeria. Canoeing, labor, trails, trade, expenses, outfitting, flora, tribal histories, witchcraft.

★ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 5 cents—in Mr. Beadle's case 12 cents—in stamps NOT attached)*

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14. ★ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo.
CHARLES BEADLE, Ile de Lerne, par Vannes, Morbihan, Brittany, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport. (*Postage 12 cents.*)

15. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
CAPTAIN F. J. FRANKLIN, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

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J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Egypt and Sudan, Tunis, Algeria. Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

20. Turkey and Asia Minor
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

21. Balkans, except Albania
J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York. Greece, Jugo-Slavia, Bulgaria, Roumania. Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

22. Albania
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

23. Scandinavia
ROBERT S. TOWNSEND, 1447 Irving St., N. W., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

24. South America Part 1
EDGAR YOUNG, care *Adventure*. Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

25. South America Part 2
P. H. GOLDSMITH, *Inter-American Magazine*, 407 West 117th St., New York, N. Y. Venezuela, the Guianas, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentine Republic. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

26. Central America
CHARLES BELL EMERSON, 90 So. Orchard St., San José, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

27. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

28. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. MAHAFFEY, Topolobampo, Sinaloa, Mexico. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

29. ✠ Canada Part 1
S. E. SANGSTER ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Height of Land and northern Quebec and Ontario (except strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.); southeastern Ungava and Keewatin. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

30. ✠ Canada Part 2
HARRY M. MOORE, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Ottawa Valley and southeastern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping, aviation. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

31. ✠ Canada Part 3
GEORGE L. CATTON, Tweed, Ont., Canada. Georgian Bay and southern Ontario. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

32. Canada Part 4
T. F. PHILLIPS, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Hunters Island and English River district. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

33. Canada Part 5
ED. L. CARSON, Mount Vernon, Wash. Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

34. ✠ Canada Part 6
REECE H. HAGUE, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and northern Keewatin. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

35. ✠ Canada Part 7
JAS. F. B. BELFORD, Codrington, Ont., Canada. New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

36. Alaska
THEODORE S. SOLOMONS, 2837 Fulton St., Berkeley, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

37. Baffinland and Greenland
VICTOR SHAW, 172 Chittenden Ave., Columbus, Ohio. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

38. Western U. S. Part 1
E. E. HARRIMAN, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. California, Oregon, Washington, Utah, Nevada, Arizona (except portions mentioned below). Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

39. Western U. S. Part 2
VICTOR SHAW, Shaw Mines Corp., Silverton, Colo. Arizona. Cliff dwellings, Two Grey Peaks, the Carrizo Mts., Cañon De Chelley, Chin Lee Wash, the Moonlight Country, the Blue Mts. (Utah), Navaho Indian Reservation, in general. Pack trips, prospecting, hunting, camping, trapping and mining; habits, etc., of Navaho Indians.

40. Western U. S. Part 3
FRANK MIDDLETON, 1727 Lafayette St., Denver, Colo. Colorado and Wyoming. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

41. Western U. S. Part 4
CHESTER C. DAVIS, Helena, Mont. Montana and the northern Rocky Mountains. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

42. Western U. S. Part 5
J. W. WHITEAKER, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Texas and Oklahoma. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

43. Middle Western U. S. Part 1
JOSEPH MILLS HANSON (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. The Dakotas, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

44. Middle Western U. S. Part 2
JOHN B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Missouri, Arkansas and the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

45. Middle Western U. S. Part 3
J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and Lake Michigan. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

46. Eastern U. S. Part 1
RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Little Falls, N. Y. Mississippi, Ohio, Tennessee, Michigan and Hudson valleys; Great Lakes, Adirondacks. Automobile, motorcycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating; river tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

47. Eastern U. S. Part 2
HOWARD A. SHANNON, *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Va. Motor-boat and canoe cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and tributary rivers. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia, and Maryland.

48. Eastern U. S. Part 3
HAPSBURG LIEBE, Orlando, Fla. Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, N. and S. Carolina, Florida and Georgia except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

✠ *(Enclose addressed envelop with 3 cents in stamps NOT attached)*

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49. Eastern U. S. Part 4
DR. G. E. HATHORNE, 70 Main Street, Bangor, Me. Maine. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

WEAPONS, PAST and PRESENT

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

A.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

B.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. DONEGAN WIGGINS, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

C.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. LEWIS APPLETON BARKER, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

OLD SONGS THAT MEN HAVE SUNG

ROBERT FROTHINGHAM, 745 Riverside Drive, New York City. A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads —songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.

FISHING IN NORTH AMERICA

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

J. B. THOMPSON, 906 Pontiac Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Covering fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

MOUNTAINS and MOUNTAINEERING

Especially of New England. ARTHUR BENT, Appalachian Mountain Club, 1050 Tremont Bldg., Boston, Mass.

STANDING INFORMATION

For information on trade in any part of the world, address J. L. BINDA, National Foreign Trade Council, 1 Hanover Sq., New York.

For general information on U. S. and its possessions, write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash., D. C., for catalog of all Government publications.

For the Philippines, Porto Rico, and customs receiverships in Santo Domingo and Haiti, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii, Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash, D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union may be called upon for general information relating to Latin-American matters or for specific data. Address L. S. ROWE, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For R. C. M. P., Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

Opportunities in Peru

NO COUNTRY like it for those who like potatoes:

Question:—"I would be greatly obliged to you if you would let me know some particulars regarding Peru. What variations of climate are there, and how does the Peruvian Government regard immigrants? Is land available, and at what prices? Please inform me as to the chief industries. Also if you could let me know particulars of transport both to and in Peru; I think it will make a fairly composite list of information for an interested settler."—H. BECK, Aena, Rononga, Solomon Is.

Answer, by Mr. Young:—The republic of Peru is an immense stretch of land with a coastline beginning just below the equator, comparatively speaking, and extending almost to the tropic of Capricorn, and inland across and over the tops of the Andes Mountains and down into the low, hot lands of the Amazon basin.

The western coast is rather dry and desert, due to the fact that rain-bearing clouds are unable to cross the mountains from the east. In the southern portion of the coast it sometimes remains dry for twenty years without a drop of rain, but in the northern part of this coast rain is frequent. Some few rivers flow into the Pacific, and the valleys are cultivated and fertile. Proceeding up the mountains, changes are evident, due to altitude, and the ruins and terraced lands that were used by the ancient Incas are to be seen.

Potatoes are grown by the Indians up to an altitude of 12,000 feet and are the best-tasting potatoes on earth. Sheep and the native sheep-like animals (llama, alpaca, vicuña, and guanaco) thrive in this high country. The tops of the mountains are covered with heavy ice-caps and snow, perpetually.

Proceeding down the eastern slopes, due to rainfall, the conditions are different from the western slopes. Forests are soon encountered; many streams begin to flow, until the low, matted tropical jungle of the Amazon basin is encountered. A man can find any climate he wishes in Peru just by searching for it.

The Peruvian Government is very anxious to get immigrants and will make any offer in reason to a *bona-fide* settler who wishes to get land to settle on. By taking out citizenship papers free land can be obtained and additional wild land purchased in large tracts for about ten cents per acre.

Recently they brought out many Englishmen from the old country for colonization purposes, but I understand most of them are city dwellers who sit around waiting with folded hands for something to turn up. I guess you know that sort?

There is also a company selling land here in the U. S. on some 650,000 acres in the Sacramento pampa in eastern Peru. A great number have written me about this company, but I have no direct information except that such a company is selling land and expects to take a number down there soon. I think a man might do better on his own if he had any initiative.

Principal industries of Peru are mining, farming and sheep-raising. Copper, sugar, rubber, gold, quinin-bark, hides, are the principal exports.

The Cerro de Pasco Copper Co., at Cerro de Pasco, usually employs several hundred white men at a good wage. Many other American and English companies are operating. It would be a good plan to work for a time and then look around for what you wanted in the way of land.

Transportation in Peru: The Peru Central goes

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up and over the Andes from Lima (or Callao, the port) and down a way on the other side. From Oroya on this line the Cerro de Pasco line leaves for their operations in several places. Other smaller roads run in various parts. On the eastern side transportation is carried on by river boats, launches and by pack-animals.

The full statement of the "Ask Adventure," as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Knoxville to Syracuse by Flivver

CAMP out on the way and save money:

Question:—"Your name has been sent me as a reliable source of information for proposed auto trip.

In Pleasant Hill, Tenn., 2,000 feet above Knoxville in Cumberland Mountains, there is a missionary school where I am much interested.

Am wanting to bring a party of five (three ladies and two young men) by auto from there to Syracuse, N. Y.

These young people have never been out of the mountains, and my hope is to give them a little education which can not be well found between the covers of a book.

These young men read Latin and demonstrate geometry, but have never seen an electric car, an elevator, a bathtub with hot and cold water faucets, etc.

My desire is to travel in a Ford, buying milk, eggs, vegetables, etc., *en route* and live Gipsy fashion with the aid of a tent, in this way stopping at Washington, D. C., and New York City, returning *via* Niagara Falls.

All they know about the ocean is a picture in their geography.

Have explained in detail to show need of strictest economy.

What would be your estimate of such a trip, and what equipment necessary? We have the Ford car, and both young men understand the making of any ordinary adjustment or repair and can run car. We also have plenty of Army blankets.

Any advice or suggestions you can make will be greatly appreciated."—(Miss) EDITH E. SCOTT, Syracuse, N. Y.

Answer, by Mr. Spears:—The cost of a trip from Knoxville, *via* Washington and New York, to Syracuse, would depend most on the time taken. Food would cost, raw material, probably $2.50 to $3.00 a day for five. The mountain folk live very simply, as you know, and their fare has been corn and bacon at times.

My experience traveling is that 60 or 70 miles a day is fast enough. The distance is about 1,200 miles, say, by roadway. This would be twenty days' journey, allowing a little time to look around. The Ford will average about 18 miles to the gallon of gas—seventy gallons, perhaps. Oil, too.

We found, going to the Pacific and back, that utmost simplicity of outfit is best. They could sew up 90-inch wide muslin into 7½ foot tents, waterproof them with any waterproofing, and by spreading tarpaulin-canvas squares on the ground, sleep there. Model of tents would be lean-to, and stand against sides of automobile or on poles, as in usual auto tent. Waterproofing to be had at any tent-makers. Home-made tents of this type are very serviceable; can be waterproofed with paraffin dissolved in gasoline and painted on the cloth. No cheaper nor better tent, I think.

Tarpaulins are squares, or rectangles, of canvas, painted, and with cloth loops for rope ends, a foot larger each way than the bottom of the tents. Then curl bottom of tent under their edges, and lift front. This permits sleeping on ground, as in a saucer—nothing can creep over edges. Hay, brush, ferns, etc, under the tarpaulin serves to soften the bunk.

Ten-cent store cooking-utensils, a good iron grid of some kind, a 3-gallon can to carry water—you need really very little. Start light and buy what experience proves needful. I should say $150 would be the cost to Syracuse; return much less.

Borneo

HERE'S an island that seems to offer the highly desirable combination of good opportunities and good climate. But you've got to pick your localities with care:

Question:—This Winter I am planning to go to the East Indies on a prospecting-trip, Borneo or New Guinea preferably. I would like to know something of the customs of the people and what inducements the countries named above offer in the way of minerals, exploring and general interest. Could you send me information as to where I could obtain a general survey of the minerals produced there? Is the country subject to fever, and what months of the year are the hottest?

Do I have to get a permit from the British or Dutch Government to travel in the interior? Stamped envelope inclosed for reply."—ROBERT LA FORD, Canton, O.

Answer, by Captain Giddings:—Borneo offers a not overcrowded field for prospecting, and you can make your choice of the following:

Gold, platina, diamonds, quicksilver, cinnabar, iron, copper, tin, sulfur, petroleum, antimony, rock-salt, coal and marble.

The climate is practically unchanging the year around; rainfall is extremely abundant, and is perhaps the heaviest from October to February, and least during the months of April and May. Some portions of the country are extremely unhealthy, and fever is prevalent. In the high lands—from four thousand to seven thousand feet—the climate is pleasant and healthful, if you don't mind rain.

The Dyaks are a friendly and intelligent people; the Malays and Chinese are peaceable. In the *Hinterland*—as far back as you are likely to go—you will not encounter any really hostile natives.

When reaching a port in either Dutch or British Borneo call at the administrative offices and register your firearms. There you will readily receive permission to prospect, and also doubtless some excellent advice.

In the upper Sarawak Valley (British territory) there are gold-mines that appear to be paying well. The greater number of diamonds—they are rather

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yellowish in color—found in Borneo come from the Kapaus (or Kapewas) valley, and are shipped from the port of Pontianak (Dutch territory). In my opinion Pontianak would be the logical "jumping-off" place. You could make your way to the Kapaus valley, and if nothing offered there, could cross the range—I understand there is a route—into the upper Sarawak Valley. As I said, the climate in the mountains is pleasant.

I wish you good fortune.

The Prospector's Outfit.

BUY everything you can at the five-and-ten. Chances are your enthusiasm will wear out long before your equipment does, no matter how frail:

Question:—"Would you please give me any information you can on prospecting for precious and useful metals, especially the following:

What outfit would I need to be well equipped for all kinds of prospecting, clothing included.

What style of tent is best?

What foods are best to carry? Quantity for thirty days per man?

Where could I get burros (that is, large ones, broke to pack)?

What firearms would I need for table and protection? I have a .45 Army model Colt's. Is this too heavy?

What game could I expect? Would I need a license when such is for the table only?

Name some districts that you think best for prospecting and best points to outfit from for same.

Where could I get good maps of the district you may select, and the name or number to order them by?

What would be the best way to go about getting a partner?

What is the best month to hit the trail?

I would also like to get some books, either technical, historical or fiction, on the above subject. I prefer the States of California, Arizona or Nevada.

If this is to appear in print, please leave off name and address."

Answer, by Mr. Harriman:—Tent (tarp 7 x 14), blankets, collapsible canvas bucket, shovel, pick, canteen, water-bag to hold ten gallons, belt-pick, gold-pan, horn spoon, bottle of acid with glass stopper, magnifying-glass, frying-pan, camp-kettle, little pot for coffee, one large milk-pan, one large spoon, three smaller spoons, knife, fork, two metal bowls, lid for frying-pan, sawbuck saddle, pair of alforgases, ax of small size, rifle, revolver, forty-foot rope, burro, flour, bacon, salt, canned milk, sugar, rice, prunes, baking-powder, can lard or substitute, cans of tomatoes, tin cup, plenty tobacco if you use it, metal plates (2), butcher-knife, can-opener, small lantern, metal container holding gallon coal-oil, whetstone, plenty of nerve and knowledge of the country and camping.

Write to Forest Service, Department of Agriculture, and ask for a copy of the "Handbook for Campers." This gives a complete list for campers, food and all. Prospectors get along with fewer dishes and less grub.

Any A tent is all right, but get it small and light and waterproofed. Get burros almost anywhere in the desert country. Men keep them to sell or rent.

You won't see much of any game in the desert country except rabbits; and that is where the most mineral lies. Sure you have to get a license. Killing for your table is all any one is expected to do. No sale of game here in California.

There are no very good places to prospect in. The entire West has been combed by thousands of men who know mineral. Prospecting is a wild gamble with the cards stacked against you. I do not advise any man to try it.

Then a tenderfoot would die on the desert beyond a doubt. He can't get an experienced man as a partner, not once in a thousand times. If you must prospect, try Curry County, Oregon, where there is plenty of water and game and fish. If you don't find mineral you can keep alive there.

Outfit at Grant's Pass and hoof it across the mountains. You may not get a burro there, and you may. If not, take an old, gentle horse to pack.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Shark-Farming

ADD this to the list of unique occupations:

Question:—"I would like if you would give me some information on a rather unusual point; *i.e.*, where are sharks largest and most plentiful? I am addressing this question to your department as I rather expect the Seychelles or Nicobar Islands as the answer.

This is not an idle question, since, having located a prolific spot, I intend taking up shark-fishing as a livelihood. I have some knowledge of the Indian Ocean, but no idea how it compares with, say, Polynesia or West Indian waters.

I enclose a reply coupon and addressed envelop. The address I give is merely for *bona fides*."—A. D. STEWART, Toronto, Ont., Can.

Answer, by Capt. Dingle:—So far as my experience goes great sharks may be found almost anywhere in the warm seas; but individually the largest shark I ever saw was caught off Colombo, Ceylon, and is still, I believe, in the museum there, measuring something between thirty and forty feet. I speak from memory. Anyhow, it's a whale of a shark!

Anywhere in the Indian Ocean, as you surmise, great sharks abound, and as an industry should prove profitable if you set about the business properly with a decent outfit, enough capital, and find your market before you catch your fish.

Personally I think the Indian Ocean more likely to produce a lot of big sharks than either Polynesia or the Caribbean, though big fellows are found in these seas too. The Red Sea has plenty of them, but scarcely running so big as farther south.

As for a base, or market either, the Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal, the Seychelles, Ceylon, or the Chagos Archipelago are all spots where you may establish posts without interference if you first see the authorities and ask leave.

The only man I ever knew who made big money

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out of sharks knew how to turn the skins into shagreen, and he based on a little island with a bottle-nosed harbor, artificially closed still further the entrance, and baited the inside. Then sharks flocked in, and he closed the entrance and killed the biggest sharks, letting the rest go out again. He used the offal and meat for the next bait, and by the time he had tanned his skins his bait was ripe enough for use.

Good luck, and plenty of sharks, wherever you go.

A two-cent stamp won't carry everywhere. Read Rule I and note sections marked ★ or ✠.

Hyperboreans

IN GREEK mythology were "a people, favorites of Apollo, supposed to dwell beyond the north wind, where they enjoyed perpetual Spring, unbroken peace and eternal youth." (Standard Dictionary.) Nowadays the word is applied to any dwellers in the extreme north. And that's why Mr. Solomons applies it to the Eskimos of Alaska:

Question:—"I wish to take up a residence of two or three years among the natives of Alaska for the purpose of studying them. How and where is this possible? What approximate expense? What equipment, etc?

No doubt those few questions will enable you to give me a more comprehensive reply than if I asked a greater number."—RAYMOND E. ADAMS, Los Angeles, Calif.

Answer, by Mr. Solomons:—Your interesting question fails to disclose any preference for the one or the other kind of "native" of Alaska, the Indian or the very different Eskimo. I think I am the only fictionist who writes more or less frequently of the Eskimo, and as I knew the Indians almost equally well you may surmise, quite rightly, that I consider the Eskimo far and away the more interesting.

I suggest in either case for both convenience and cheapness, your going to the Yukon, at any one of several points of settlement, and living near and trading with the Indians. You can about make a living at that, so that your expense will be confined to your fare in and out. Similarly, with the Eskimos, go to, say, Candle, or Kotzebue, on Kotzebue Sound, *via* Nome, and do precisely the same thing. It was in the latter region that I gained mainly my knowledge of these hyperboreans, and I count them today among my best friends, though I have not seen one of them for nearly ten years. Yet you may mention my name to them—Isagalagoruk (the man who wears glasses all the time) and it will be in some sense a letter of introduction. They knew me for ten years all up and down the western and northwestern coast of Alaska.

You don't need any equipment, except a purely personal one. Not even special clothes. Buy what you need up there where you will see and be told just what is best. I will be glad to answer specifically further questions should you actually decide to go.

Gun-Toting in Central America

ALSO some dope about one of the earliest, if not the very earliest, Smith & Wesson smoke-wagon:

Toledo, O.

Question:—"The alibi for this letter is the cover on the Jan. 30th issue of *Adventure* and the fact that am somewhat of a gat-bug myself. Have just got a hold of a single-action revolver made by Smith & Wesson some time around 1855. It has marked on the cylinder, 'Patented April 3, 1855.' It's one I have never seen before, and I believe it is rather ancient as none of my friends who are also gat-bugs have ever seen one like it either. Probably is a common enough gat to you old-timers, but it's new to us.

Have written Smith & Wesson about it, and they have no records of it as it was made in either Norwich or New Haven, Conn., prior to the time the firm established in Springfield. Am enclosing a rather crude drawing of it, from which I hope you will be able to get an idea of what it looks like. Wish you would look it over and give me what dope you have on hand as to the popularity of it at time of manufacture and if there was anything startling in its appearance at the time of manufacture. The fact is we have an idea that it was among the first fixed ammo revolvers to be made. We are probably wrong though, as we are rather new at the game.

Here's a little dope you may be able to use. My partner and I took a little *pasear* down Central America way a few months ago, and we both had New Service Colts, .44-40's, with us. We landed at La Union, Salvador, and went through the customs inspection; and of course, not knowing local conditions, we had our gats in our packs, and Juan Inspector found them and took 'em away from us right now on account of them being over .38 caliber. It's again' the law of that man's *pais* to pack anything over .38.

We would have been O. K. if we had them on us where they belonged as the custom is if one has a gat he had better wear it. They figure what good is a gun to one if it is in his pack?

We wired the U. S. minister at the capital but got no answer after a wait of twenty-four hours, and finally ran across a medico from Honduras who spoke United States. We gave him our tale of wo, and he got busy and sent a wire to some friend of his at the capital, and in two and a half hours a wire came back for them to turn over our gats to us. We went from there to Amapala, Honduras, the same day in company with the medico and he got us through the Hondurian customs with no trouble.

About a month after as we were waiting for a train at a junction up on the north coast of Honduras we got picked up by a *comandante* and his bunch of ragamuffins they call soldiers, due to a wire he had got about four gringos holding up a pay-car or a station over near San Pedro—never did find out just what it was. We got a hearing before a little old drunk who was playing judge at that time and got searched; and of course there was much commotion when they found the .44-40's and 435 rounds of ammo.

We got cleared of the hold-up charge after they wired a dozen times or so, but *Señor Comandante* had fallen in love with out gats and wouldn't turn them over. The kid telegrapher, who had much respect for gringos (they call a white man a gringo

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) his face down there) sent a message to the gover-
or of La Ceiba on his own account; and the gover-
or wired back to the *comandante* to give us our
its and a pass on the railroad to La Ceiba, which
e did with much regret.

There is a law in most of those Central and South
merican countries which says one can not carry
ove .38 caliber and that one must have a permit
lso. It is a mere technicality, but one had better
nform to be on the safe side. We saw several .45
olt auto guns; but those who had them were well-
nown Americans in the localities and they had
ermits to do so.

The standard gat is either the Colt .38 or the
. & W. .38 Special; in fact one can not buy ammo
r anything else.

Those spics are gun-totin' fools. On the trail
very spic one meets has either one or the other of
ie above gats on him. They pack 'em out in plain
ght, and he who has a gat on him is addressed as
ñor; if not it's *hombre*. They will save for years
o get enough to buy a gat; and when they get it
hey drape it on themselves and let it rust. I
xamined some of them—all good gats, such as
fficer's Model Colts—and one could hardly see
hrough the barrel; and on some one could not throw
ut the cylinder. They don't know what oil means
nd think it unnecessary, therefore the only gat to
ecommend for those countries is a .38 caliber.
Vould not say that this holds good below Panama;
ut for Central America, yes.

Hope you find this of some use to you in answering
nquiries and that you can give us some dope on the
nclosed sketch."—FRANK P. CAREY, Toledo, O.

Answer, by Mr. Wiggins:—I am glad you gave me the information you did in regard to the .38 and .44 calibers in Central America. I hope your letter will find a place in "A. A." as some of the boys might try the same trip, and not find a friend to intercede for them. *Gracias, señor.*

Now as to the little Smith & Wesson revolver. I have seen and used many of them, and found some good shooters, others poor, due to whatever degree of care had been used in their maintenance. Some shot really well, I recall. They are getting pretty scarce now, I fear, so you are fortunate that you secured this one.

"They were the first of the Smith & Wesson revolvers, in so far as I am able to learn, and were used somewhat in the Civil War. They were the first made for metallic ammunition, so far as I know, but the old Volcanic repeating pistol, which looked and worked like a Winchester, was patented a year earlier. The Volcanic used a bullet with the explosive in the base, and the whole works went out the barrel, while your pistol used the regular rim fire ammunition.

In re the spiggoty countries: I think a man could get by with a .38 W. C. F. cartridge, as it's branded .38 Winchester when it's really a .40 caliber and very powerful. But, as you say, the .38 Special is so easy gotten, what else would a fellow need, say I?

Thanking you for that information, and trusting this will be the desired information on the Smith & Wesson, I remain, yours truly, D. WIGGINS.

P. S.—Look on the other side of this sheet for some revolver dope.—D. W.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

RUPPER, FRANK. Last heard of in 1889 in Santa Fé after leaving his home in Switzerland. Age eighteen ears at the time. Thought to be going to South America. ny one knowing of his whereabouts is asked to communite with his sister.—Address M. H., care of *Adventure.*

RUNTY, PRIVATE PETER. Lived at Appleton, Wis. at one time, later in 1919 served overseas with e 4th Provost Guard. Write to SHARPY at the old address.

RAUTIGAN, JACK. Of the 4th Provost Guard. Write to SHARPY at the old address.

REZENSE, LAWRENCE. Formerly of Appleton, Wis.; thought to be serving in the Navy. Write to SHARPY at the old address.

OHNSON, NORMAN LE ROY. Lived at Waukegan, Ill., and later, 1920, at Appleton, Wis. Write HARPY at the old address.

OSSE, HENRY. Left Bluffs, Ill., March 28, 1898. Write brother.—Address WM. BOSSE, Box 545, Torngton, Wyoming.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

CHAPLINE, CLYDE. Everything is all O. K. now; write to me at once, because mama is worrying her life out about you.—Address LEE CHAPLINE, Box 91, Eddy, Tex.

BRENT, C. G. Last heard from in Seattle. Old friend wishes to hear from you.—Address W. K. YOUNG, Rural Route, Lynden, Wash.

SHARPE, CECIL. Age twenty-five; five feet nine inches, gray eyes, dark-brown hair, round-shouldered, near-sighted, wears glasses. Last heard of in Kamloops, B. C., Canada, Nov., 1920. May be in Australia or in U. S. A. Any information will be appreciated.—Address father, A. E. SHARPE, Pritchard, B. C., Canada.

MERZ, ALFRED C. Last heard from in Grand Rapids, Mich., June 12, 1918. Age thirty-five years; height five feet eleven inches; weighs about 175 pounds. Black hair, brown eyes. Badly broken arches. Al please get in touch with the kid. Any information will be greatly appreciated.—Address ERWIN M. MERZ, 810 Elm St., Buffalo, N. Y.

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BROOKS, DR. EDWARD, brother. Left Atlanta, Ga., for New Orleans the last week in May, 1919. Received one letter dated June 7, 1919, saying that he would sail the next day for South America. Any information regarding him would be greatly appreciated.—Address MISS SADIE BROOKS, 128 Milledge Ave., Atlanta, Ga.

PENAVIN, GEORGE. Last heard of at Camp Kearny, Calif., when he was discharged from Co. D. 37nd Inf. He is about five feet eight inches tall; 150 pounds. Has light brown hair and blue eyes. English slightly broken. Lived in Quincy and Sterling, Ill., but may now be in Detroit. Any information regarding him will be appreciated. —Address L. A. REISCHE. Hersman, Illinois.

MACAULEY or MCCAULEY, DUDLEY. Went to California between 1894 and 1900, and was last known to have a ranch in that State. He had a sister who married a Mr. McCarthy and lived in San Francisco. Any information regarding him would be appreciated.—Address JOSEPH D. MACAULEY, 67 Myrtle St., Lawrence, Mass.

RUMPF, GEORGE A. Last heard of November, 1920, at Dedham, Mass. Any information as to his present whereabouts will be greatly received.—Address FRANK A. CARNEY, Liberty Theater, Fort Sill Oklahoma.

HUFF, RAY and sister VERA, formerly of La Jolla, Calif. Remember Tommy the Canuck? Write SGT.-MAJOR THOMAS H. WINTERS, Headquarters Dept., American Forces in Germany, Coblenz, Germany.

ACKERN, HORACE. English descent; born in Baltimore; about forty six or forty seven years old. About five feet six and one half inches tall; brown eyes, dark-brown hair, dark mustache. Last heard of thirteen years ago. Steam-fitter on U. S. government vessel *Florida*, Brooklyn Navy Yard.—Address GEORGE I. CLARKE, Oreland, Montgomery Co., Pa.

COX, SHERMAN W. and AUSTIN. Sons of Daniel Cox of Indianapolis, Ind. Living in Colorado Springs, Colorado, in 1897. Blacksmiths by trade Any information concerning their whereabout will be appreciated.—Address MISS FLORETTE COX, 86 Huntington Ave., Boston, Mass.

WASHBROAD, TOMMY or JOE. Of Montreal. Where are you? Address LAK, care of *Adventure*.

WOULD like to hear from any member of the 14th Battalion R. M. R., Canadian Army, who was acquainted with Raymond Kearns, who died in action Easter Monday, 1917, at Vimy Ridge.—Address LAK, care of *Adventure*.

ANDREWS, NORMAN. Husband. Please let me hear from you at once. I am sick and want to see you.—Address JUNO, General Delivery, Ardmore, Okla.

LEWEY, HARRY F. A carpenter by trade. Home in Lynn, Mass. Construction foreman for Bates & Rogers at Camp Upton, L. I., in 1918. Later at Hog Island. Last heard from at Rockford, Ill. Any one knowing his address please write.—Address PAUL PENNY, Center Moriches, N. Y

THE following have been inquired for in either the April 30th or May 10th issues of Adventure. They can get the names of the inquirers from this magazine:

BALDWIN, HARRY; Boyton, Joseph A.; Brassel, John H.; Burns Harry; Chapline, Clyde; Donohew, Gertrude, Mrs.; Doyle, Eddie Mrs.; Everett, E.; Haigh, Mason C.; Hall, C. J.; Hall, Lamar, Dr.; Hicks, Marien; Irving, Thomas M.; Klein, Black'e; La Porte Harry; Melius, Fred; Mittler, Edward J.; Russell, Juel C.; Seabourn (or Steabourne, Seabourne); See, John; Stewart, Donald or Russell; Stocker, Ethel C.; Winnie, George.

MISCELLANEOUS—"Billy" Boys of U. S. S. *Ronda*, Cal.; Ex Member of Battery A. 3rd Batt., Hannigan, Joe; Mang, Freddy; Parlen, Pinky; McCarthy or any of the boys who worked for the S. P. U. at Camp Merritt, N. J. in Summer of 1919; relatives of Eslicks or Pierces who settled in Webster and Polk counties, Iowa, about 1850; R. E. H.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

MAY 30TH ISSUE

Besides the new serial and the complete novelette described on the second contents page, the next issue will bring you the following stories:

BOOT HILL — *Frederick R. Bechdolt*
Great names on lonely trails.

STEVENSON'S LIMIT — *Harrison R. Howard*
The immeasurable element in man.

INTO THE EAST — *R. T. M. Scott*
A Yankee detective in India.

A SHOT AT A VENTURE A Three-Part Story Part II — *Captain Dingle*
Facing cannibals in New Guinea, with the law pursuing.

SUNWING — *F. St. Mars*
Bird battles.

AT STROUD'S An Off-the-Trail Story — *Crosbie Garstin*
White crosses in the African night.

THE LAST TRIP DOWN — *Max Bonter*
A foundering ore-ship on the Great Lakes.

THE KNIFE-FIGHTER FROM HELSINGFORS — *Charles Nicholls Webb*
Gas in the 360-foot level.

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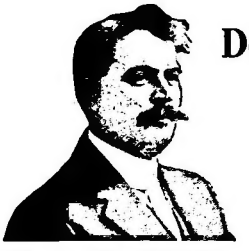
Where Will You Be At 65?



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4 will be wealthy
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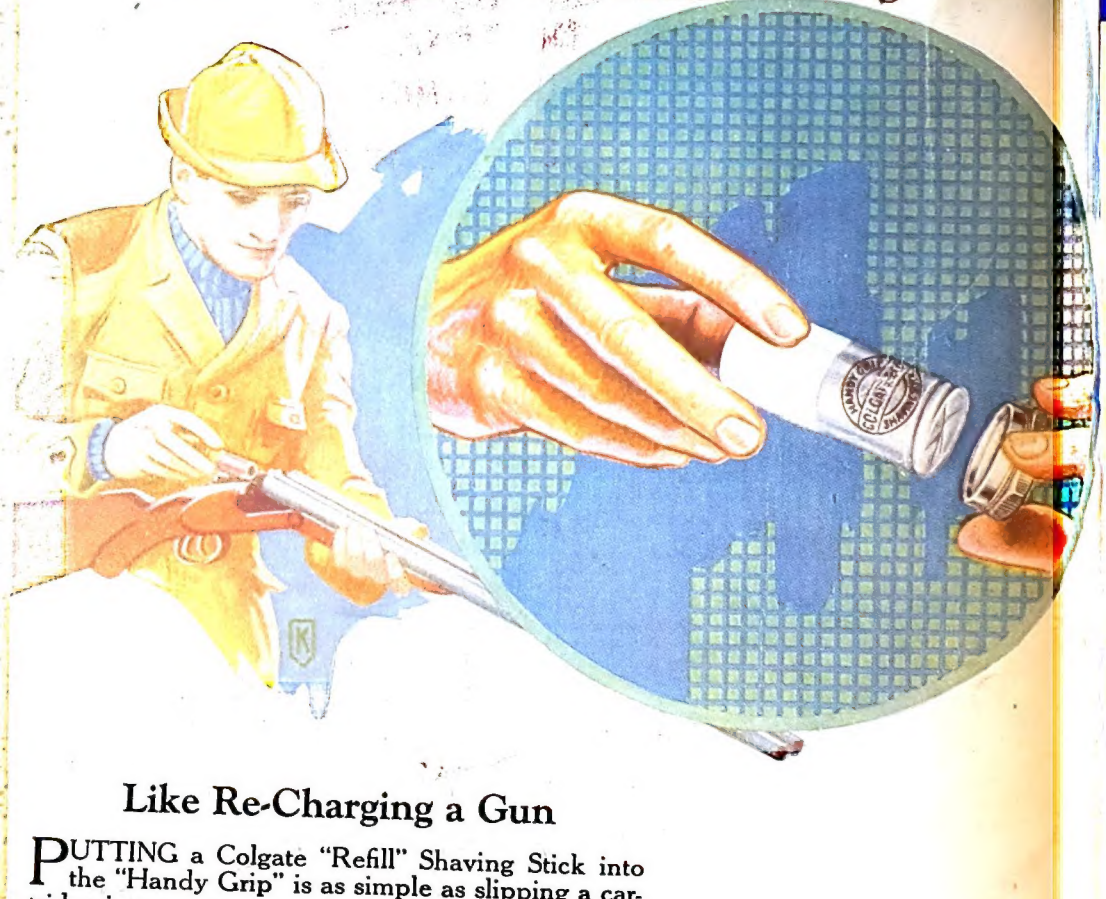

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